

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF
THE BLIND JAMES WILSON
WITH
AN ESSAY ON HIS
LIFE AND WRITINGS
AND ON THE
PRESENT STATE OF THE BLIND.

ST. ALBAN'S LITERARY INSTITUTION.

The Committee of the above Institution, have the honor to announce that on Thursday Evening next, December 7th, 1854, a LECTURE on the *Capabilities, Rights, and Treatment of the Blind*, will be delivered by JOHN BIRD, Esq., (Member of the College of Surgeons, England,) who is himself Blind.

SYLLABUS.

The duty of Society to enquire into the present and past condition of that section of waste mind imprisoned, and too often degraded and pauperised, by Blindness, as a just and necessary step towards reclaiming it, by restoring the Blind to the elevating privileges of Life—viz:—Social intercourse, useful labour, intellectual, moral, and religious culture, kept alive, invigorated and expanded, by its only possible means—A constant supply of adequate motive, and the opportunity of sustained application.

The Lecture will embrace a cursory glance at the various conditions of Mental imprisonment, either from Paralysis or loss of sense, Paralysis or loss of limb, defective education, isolation or penal restraint: and in particular from Blindness, and the diseases of mind and body, as well as the social degradation, too frequently the lot of those whom enlightened philanthropy has not reached, contrasted with the high intellectual attainments, social utility, respect and independence, secured by others, who in ancient times, as well as at the present day, have enjoyed a happier fate.—Biographical Sketches in proof of the above, and a scheme for the elevation of the hitherto neglected Blind, explained and earnestly advocated, not merely on sound principles of Political Economy, but on the higher grounds of Human Rights and Christian Duty.

According to the Census of 1851, there were in Great Britain, Ireland, and the British Isles, 29,074 Blind: i.e., Males, 14,061; Females, 14,213; viz.,—London, 2,305; the rest of England, 14,598; Ireland, 7,587; Scotland, 3,010; Wales, 1,403; British Isles, 171.

By the Census of 1853, it was ascertained that the number of Blind in France amounted to 38,662.

According to the last Report of the Brighton Blind School, it has been computed that there were in existence from ten to fifteen millions of Blind, and that a hundred and sixty thousand die annually, more or less *Instructed and Elevated*, or *Neglected and Degraded*.

Dr. Augustus Zeüne, Director of the Blind Institution at Berlin, states that the proportion of the Blind to the Sighted increase as we approach the equator. The ratio of the Blind to the Sighted between the 50th and 70th parallels of Latitude, he states to be 1 in 1,056; between the 40th and 50th, 1 in 800; between the 30th and 40th, 1 in 277; and between the 20th and 30th, 1 in 100. The greatest part of our East India possessions lie between the 10th and 25th parallels of Latitude, and the rate of Blindness in a population of nearly 125,000,000 must be immense, all of whom, in addition to those in the West Indies, Africa, Australia, the Ionian Islands, and our North American possessions have a right to look to the English Government for enquiry, that the amount, nature, and extent of the evil might plead its own cause, and that the example of the British public at home may point out the most successful course to be adopted by those philanthropist who would wish to extend the blessings of this hitherto neglected branch of civilization to those afar off.

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HISTORY
BIRD

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"I, DARK IN LIGHT, EXPOSED
TO DAILY FRAUD, CONTEMPT, ABUSE, AND WRONG,
WITHIN DOORS OR WITHOUT, STILL AS A FOOL,
IN POWER OF OTHERS, NEVER IN MY OWN;
SCARCE HALF I SEEM TO LIVE; DEAD MORE THAN HALF."

Milton.

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1856

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF THE
BLIND JAMES WILSON,

AUTHOR OF THE "LIVES OF THE USEFUL BLIND;"

WITH A

Preliminary Essay on his Life, Character, and Writings,

AS WELL AS ON

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE BLIND.

BY

JOHN BIRD,

(BLIND,)

MEMBER OF THE COLLEGE OF SURGEONS, ENGLAND,

AND

DAY'S PENSIONER.

"LIGHT IS BUT THE SHADOW OF THE DEITY,
TRUTH IS HIS SUBSTANCE."

Barthelemy.

Let but their friends reflect the substance, and the blind will not miss the shadow; but if the ear of the blind be deceived, and their confidence betrayed by the suppression, distortion, or perversion of truth, no poison can be more deadly, though its fatal process may be slow, and no agony more intense, though its cause and effects may be unsuspected and unseen.

LONDON:
WARD AND LOCK, 158, FLEET STREET.

1856.

BLINDNESS AND ADVERSITY.—Four years since, forwared by my enquiries into and reflections on the condition and fate of the blind, I advertised for employment that might enable me to ward off the deteriorating and oft-times demoralizing tendency of pauperism and indolence, the inevitable result of impoverished, imprisoned, and unapplied mind. A far harder struggle with a greater complication of evils since that time compels me to ask again for more serious and sincere attention to my case than it has hitherto met with. Had it been my lot to have had one manly friend to stand by me from the first to cheek and steady the timid, frightened, wayward, and almost hopeless reel of an overfemaled home in adversity, or, if beyond it, the stream of information which humanity, if not friendship, should have kept free from and unpoisoned by falsehood and deception, had supplied an adequate amount of mental nutriment, pointing out at the same time the opportunities of action, this most painful and perhaps more estranging APPEAL would never have been necessary.

I am aware that, in the first place, it was due to the defective civilization of the country and circles in which it has been my lot to exist, and that well-intentioned friends, wanting a guiding principle, have relied on ever-shifting expediency. To their belief that the only means of support were those of pointing out incapacity, exciting pity, and making a market of calamity, I have opposed a constant struggle to gain every opportunity of being useful, and, by making a market of my intellect, to ensure self-support, respect, and a re-admission to the unforfeited privileges of social intercourse with my equals, the opportunities of increased and more elevated exertion. By nearly nine years of this unequal and exhausting antagonism I am now reduced to that state of isolation and dependence that I dread the common fate of too many blind, more to be dreaded than death itself—imbecility, or some more active form of insanity; and, as years shall make my imprisonment more desolate, that of becoming the helpless and uncared-for victim of the will of an inferior in some of those obliettes or painted sepulchres which are thought good enough for the blind.

In an advertisement I cannot say more than "A farewell to those who take offence at this," which a recollection of past services in my useful days, or a strict adherence to truth in one or two well-known instances, would have entirely prevented. Sincere thanks to those friends and strangers who have aided to sustain my mind, especially those servants whose native and self-refining honesty induced them to supply me with truth, and thus, ceasing to be servants, became friends—but, most of all, to that friend whose liberality has never failed, and now enables me to make this appeal. There are those who could have stated how I have laboured for others as well as myself, and to how useful and important an end, but they have fallen off, or, what is just as bad, wavered at the time of need. I hope the more serious of higher education will understand my motive and necessity, if hereafter they should meet me in the streets selling books on this or other subjects connected with reclaiming of waste mind. It will in the first place be to gain the few sentences of serious conversation from the more educated, reflecting, and matured minds, which now seldom falls to my lot, as the only antidote to isolation, and to obtain the means for the increased expenditure of excommunication, where the gratuitous aid of an efficient friend is seldom known, and to disseminate through society facts and statements which the genuine philanthropist will welcome, and by which, perhaps, the more selfish five-sensed may be induced to inquire and reflect, all of which I ought to have enjoyed, without being driven to this apparant breach of the amenities of educated life.—JOHN BIRD, Member of the College of Surgeons, England, and Day's Pensioner, 34, Newman-street, Oxford street, late of Sturminster, Newton, Dorset, of Hunter-street, Regent-place, and Guildford-street.

P.S. Before any one censures this step, let them be just and learn that the evils of isolation increase more rapidly and are more imminent than absentees can possibly imagine, even if they give themselves the trouble to think; and I earnestly hope that philanthropists, more conversant with the human mind, its laws, necessities, mode of action, and derangements in four-sensed life, will watch over and direct the cause of the blind hereafter. There is a struggle going on between the educated and necessitous blind of matured years and five-sensed teachers, directors, and amateur theorists, as to what the blind want, what they can do, and what are the best means to achieve it. In France the blind who can bring the important evidence derived from consciousness to correct the imperfect observation and mistaken theories of the five-sensed are more listened to than in England, and this accounts for their greater progress. If blessed with health of mind and opportunity I hope to publish some remarks, however fragmentary; but if prevented by death or other cause, I hope the books and other evidence I have collected will be transferred to some one free from the paltry, dishonest, and suppressive spirit, that greatest enemy to the elevation and happiness of the blind.—*Times*. April 12, 1856.

[THE Writer of the following Essay begs to inform the reader that the cause of many errors and imperfections of style must be attributed to his being blind, and his only assistant being a young man, a novice at writing and correcting for the press.]

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Blindness in Prosperity and Adversity Contrasted.

“BUT kings and peers, or ladies of high birth,
Feel not the sting like humbler sons of earth;
Blindness to them is but a partial ill,
That wounds them deeply, but it does not kill
The sweet enjoyments of domestic life,
Or fill their loving hearts with care and strife.
Want and its sorrows are by them unfelt,
Save when for others' woes they pitying melt,
And to the aching heart, oppress'd with grief,
Like angels, they administer relief.
No kindred hearts from them are turned away;
For gold, that glittering bauble, gilds their clay,
And with its yellow dross it smooths the road,
And makes endurable their dark abode.

Not thus the sons of labour are repaid
For buried hopes, when from their eyelids fade
The glorious beams of God's eternal light;
But all becomes one dark, chaotic night,
Whence dismal dreams of cares and want and woe
Prove sad realities such as few know,
Save those who feel them.”

From “Blindness,” a poem by Edmund White, to be had of the author,
8, St. James's-place, Prince's-road, Notting-hill, London. Price 2s. 6d.

E White, five years since, at the age of forty, became blind, after ten years' constant duty as one of the guards on the Great Western Railway. He is the second guard I have become acquainted with on that line who has lost his sight. On White's dismissal and application for assistance he was given ten pounds, and offered another ten if he would sign an agreement never to apply for more. Feeling he had a claim for long and active service, as well as good character, he declined it. He is self-educated, and contributes to the support of a numerous young family by his pen.—J. B.

By the same author, preparing for the press, “The Genius of the Blind,” a Poem. Price 2s. 6d. Published by subscription.

“Man, in his civil capacity, is a citizen of two republics, of which the one is material, the other intellectual. The old man ceases to belong to the first of these when his organic principle refuses to perform its wonted functions as in days past; he becomes nought but a parasite, and may reasonably dread the fate of the drones when their presence is no longer required by the working-bees. In the intellectual republic, however, he still preserves his rank and rights, and may, if he choose, do so up to the latest term of his existence. The truth of the ‘*insenescence of the intellectual principle*’ becomes thus an appeal, not only to his self-respect, but likewise to that innate sense of duty which regulates every conscientious man, and whispers in his ear, *that no opinions capable of proving useful to humanity at large ought to be buried in the tomb.*”—PROFESSOR LORDAT, of Montpellier. Dr. F. WINSLOW’s *Journal of Psychological Medicine*, July, 1852.

“The man who discovers, and who is guilty of seeing further than his neighbours, is a delinquent whom human nature in its frailty too often feels bound to punish; and he who cannot meet suspicion, and even contempt, with philosophical disregard, and who does not feel that, in the enunciation of a truth, he is speaking in suggestive language to generations unborn, must fail to maintain that spirit within him necessary to the full development of the faculties bestowed upon him by nature.”—DR. G. OWEN REES’S *Oration delivered before the Hunterian Society*, 1854.

AN ESSAY
ON
THE LIFE, CHARACTER, AND WRITINGS
OF THE
BLIND JAMES WILSON.

“And thus the wonders of one age become the common elements of education in the next.”—Mr. J. HODGSON’S *Hunterian Oration*.

“It may be taken for granted that a community cannot act *right* towards a class without *ultimately* elevating itself; nor can it act wrong towards any portion of its members without perpetuating or promoting social evils, perhaps the very evils it is anxious to eradicate.”—HOVENDEN *on Crime and Punishment*.

IN the few pages of a preface* it is impossible for me to do justice to the memory of James Wilson and the value of his writings, in any degree proportionate to the esteem and gratitude I myself, in common with other blind, feel for his character and labours. I would I had space and opportunity for that tribute of respect which is his due, and which could be no other than a careful analysis of the events of his life, his character, and the importance of the work he must have devoted so much of his time and of the energy of his intellect so successfully to accomplish. The far greater proportion of the influence of the labours of some very useful and excellent men is expended in their own day, whilst the far greater part of others is to be felt when they have passed on, and are beyond the reach of that recognition and aid, mental repose or refreshment, which they needed so much in their darkened and exhausting toil. The labours of James Wilson are evidently of this last and higher class. He has shown how much can be achieved by a well-regulated mind and a resolute will, by firmness of purpose, and obedience to the higher dictates of conscience, however much they

* The original design was a preface, but, as the subject advanced, it was found advisable to enter at greater length, and give it the more complete form of an Essay.

may interfere with the caprices or crotchets of the well-meaning, but not far-sighted.

This autobiography, originally prefixed, in its gradually enlarged state, to the four different editions of that valuable, but not sufficiently known work, "The Biography of the Blind," appeared, for the fifth time during the author's lifetime, in a separate form, in the year 1842; and it is now, after a lapse of fourteen years, again brought forward, in the hope of awakening public attention to a just appreciation of this blind man's life and labours, and the importance of the cause he has so ably aided.

From the ninth to the thirteenth page the reader will find the opinions of the press on Wilson's work, at the time his last, the fourth, edition appeared, every one of which speaks most favourably of it, and several, from personal knowledge, in just commendation of the man himself. But the blind man, as he hears these extracts read, feels a sickening chill and a temporary depression at the little recognition of their long-neglected state, their deeper sufferings, and consequently the deeper value of this book. Few people, as they pass an individual blind man or woman of their acquaintance, imagine that there are in the United Kingdom 30,000 so imprisoned, and that it has been computed that there are in existence among the population of the world from ten to fifteen millions, 160,000 of whom die annually; and as few attempt to form any conception of what must be the condition of that mind, chafing, stagnant, or festering, when those on whom the blind man depends for his animal wants, as well as mental health and development, have neglected to bring their relative or friend within the range and reach of those influences by which the means of compensation benevolently provided by the Deity should be brought into action; for, as Dr. Chalmers, in that first and best of the "Bridgewater Treatises," has pointed out the design, wisdom, and benevolence of the Deity in the adaptation of the external world to the intellectual and moral development of man, so does it stand to reason that, if the necessary amount of the means of health, growth, and exercise be not transmitted through the four remaining senses, the intellectual and moral faculties must wither, collapse, and decay; and that, if the judgment have no opportunity of duty, and the conscience no opportunity of responsibility, and the animal portion of man be the only part fully nourished, then will the appetites have undisturbed supremacy. A searching inquiry into the condition of the neglected blind in their various grades will bring much to light that ought to be known, but is little suspected. Let those who are conversant with the pernicious effects of long-continued silence and isolation on the felon extend their benevolence to those who endure a less degree of silence and isolation, but the more deadly because continued for a longer time, aggravated by

darkness, and whose term of imprisonment, unless cheered by the approach of enlightened humanity, must be for life. Twelve years since, when in practice as a surgeon, I had good testimonials from men well known in the profession of my fitness for the office for which I was then a candidate, that of one of the resident surgeons for the Middlesex Asylum at Hanwell. For the last ten years I have been blind; and, during the greater part of that period I have devoted my best energies to a serious inquiry into the mental condition of those who suffer from blindness and its consequent evils, especially when aggravated by adversity and its excommunicating influence; and, unknown as I am, I can assure the more serious readers that the evils are not overdrawn, but require a searching inquiry by minds competent to the task, because they cannot be brought forward, and are either unsuspected or unnoticed by the sentimentalist or insufficiently educated, who take too prominent a lead in the affairs of the blind. Having alluded to the intellectual and moral condition of the blind, I will add a few words on the tendency of prolonged and neglected blindness to influence their religious state. From the necessary briefness of my remarks, they may appear insufficient and incomplete; still I see the necessity of directing the attention of the more serious to this point, and I trust my motives in so doing will be understood. Every one knows that the unhealthy or unbalanced mind is not in the fittest state to understand or develop the spirit of religion, and that, if it have no opportunity of a single act or duty in life with his fellow-man, that the idea of responsibility will decline, and at the same time the active desire to seek opportunity will decline also, if he have ever present to his mind the paralysing conviction that his fellow-man does not see the serious importance of affording to him these opportunities and aids. The organisation for hearing is as useless to the blind, if his fellow-man will not pour in the daily and adequate amount of truth, as the cup or other drinking vessel in the parched-up desert, where no water is to be found.

Dr. Guillie, in his work on the Blind (which was translated into English in 1819, and dedicated to Dr. Jenner, and a copy of which is seldom to be found by those who want it), enters at some length on the question of the tendency of the blind to atheism; and those who are familiar with the writings of Prescott know how thoroughly established was the atheism of the renowned blind Dr. Nicholas Saunderson, and his reasons for it given on his death-bed. "Alas!" said the dying philosopher, "I have been condemned to pass my life in darkness, and you speak to me of prodigies which I cannot comprehend, and which can only be felt by you, and those who see like you!" When reminded of the faith of Newton, Leibnitz, and Clarke, minds from whom he had drank so deeply of instruction, and for whom he entertained the profoundest veneration, he re-

marked, "The testimony of Newton is not so strong for me as that of nature was for him. Newton believed on the word of God himself, whilst I am reduced to believe on that of Newton." He expired with this ejaculation on his lips: "God of Newton, have mercy on me!" *

The atheism of Saunderson was, undoubtedly, due to a very common cause, the exclusive study of the physical sciences; but there is another kind of absence of religious feeling to which those blind are predisposed whose mental powers are exhausted, and whose memories fail to revive at will any objects of the external world from which they have been too long estranged, and which are seldom revived by serious or sincere conversation; when they have been thrust too much into obscurity, kept in the dark as to the events of life, omitted or excluded from intercourse with their own circle, and never admitted into fresh fellowship with any other. The constant exercise of the imagination, ever scheming and endeavouring to make themselves understood, and to invent the means of regaining and of being restored to the privileges of life, produces in the end that exhaustion to which I have before alluded, and a correct idea of which is as little likely to be conceived by those in five-sensed health, as the horrors of the South Sea scurvy in olden time could be conceived by an amateur sailor whose yacht never left the Channel. A blind man may feel fully convinced *that ideas do not fade away from the memory, but that when once clearly conceived they merge into, form a part of, and expand the insenscent and indestructible mind*; yet, if he be left too long in silence, isolation, and darkness, without the necessary refreshment, and repose, and hope from confidence in the sincerity of his friends, the accumulated effects of such treatment will, in a longer period, produce a degree of derangement or disease analogous to that which falls on the felon, whose silence and isolation *without darkness* has been more severe in a shorter time.

The importance of this question will, I believe, be a sufficient excuse for my laboured attempt to explain it. I have taken this opportunity of pointing out the evils consequent on too much exile and exile education, when we have so excellent an example before us of the benefit and blessings of the very opposite condition in the life of James Wilson.

At the commencement of his career, no state could have been, apparently, more unpromising than that of a blind and friendless orphan being landed at Belfast and left solely to the care of the parochial officers. Yet, as we trace his own simple and truthful narrative, we see the child gradually developed into boyhood, and thenceforward to man's estate, respected for his probity, sustained by his conscientiousness, successful in his undertakings, and, in the

* Prescott's Essays. Bentley, 1854. Page 48.

end, conferring a blessing on mankind to an extent not yet fully foreseen. This series of developments could never have taken place had they at any time been interrupted by five or six years' imprisonment in an exile school; that simultaneous education of his sighted friends and playmates to understand and recognise his capacity would never have gone on, *pari passu*, with the growth of his own daily greater efficiency, till, by such intercourse, he was fully established as a useful and valuable member of society. This view becomes the more important, as enlightened philanthropists have at last discovered that which the blind themselves, as well as the more highly educated deaf and dumb, have long felt to be the greatest evil, the greatest barrier to their social rights and the higher privileges of life; I mean the evils of exile schools for their education. Inquiry has long proved the small per centage of those thus educated who are ever capable of self-support. I believe I am not far wrong in stating that at the expensive exile establishment, the School for the Blind, at the end of Blackfriars-road, in St. George's Fields, where nearly £2,000 a year is expended in salaries and wages alone, seldom more than seven or eight per cent. are capable of keeping themselves above and free from private or public pauperism; and, when the Abbé Carton, in the year 1836, presented his Report to the Minister for Foreign Affairs for Belgium on the state of the Blind and Blind Schools in England, he therein stated that the per centage at the *Ecole de Jeunes Aveugles* in Paris, was even less, only amounting to five per cent. of the number educated. Circumstances remained for nearly twenty years unchanged, but at length a new system and brighter hopes have dawned on the blind of France; for, whilst Dr. Hubert Valleroux has pointed out the defects and very limited success of the expensive establishments for the exile education of the deaf and dumb, as well as the blind, Dr. Blanchet has developed a scheme on the more humane and philosophic principle of social education, as will be seen by the following, translated from *La Patrie*, Oct. 15th, 1855:—

“The *Société Générale d'Assistance et de Patronage* for the deaf and dumb and blind children, founded by Dr. Blanchet, surgeon to the Imperial Institution of the Deaf and Dumb of Paris, and of which Her Majesty the Empress is the protectress, have recently obtained the most encouraging results they could possibly expect.

“Six classes had been established at different places in Paris by the exertions of the originator of the scheme for the elevation of the blind, the deaf and dumb, and the weak of intellect. The *Conseil Municipal* of Paris have recently decided, by the advice of the *Conseil Départemental de l'Instruction Publique de la Seine*, on recognising, as *Etablissements Communaux*, four of the classes, created by the society in the primary schools, under the superintendence of the *Frères des Ecoles Chrésiennes*, and have voted 3,000 francs to meet the expenses of the year 1856.

“The establishment of these classes in France is intended to solve the problem which the education of the blind as well as of the deaf and dumb presented. Up to this time it has been in special establishments, and in expensive private boarding schools, where the children are isolated from the society of the speaking community, and from the world in which they must afterwards live, that the blind and the deaf and dumb have been educated and instructed. In this new scheme, the blind and the deaf and dumb are received into the primary schools, as well as five-sensed children. They receive the same instruction; they mingle with the other children in all the corporeal exercises which can allow it, and only during the intervals of school hours they receive separate instruction in the branches for which their different deficiencies require a special mode of teaching.

“A third form, in addition to the two former, is reserved for those who have the threefold affliction of being blind as well as deaf and dumb, and for the weak of intellect.

“This system, so economical, ensures immense advantages, by enabling us to impart instruction to all the blind and deaf and dumb, as well as to the other unfortunates to whom we have alluded.”

Years since, reflecting on my own experience and the information I had gained from my inquiries into the fate of other blind, I suggested a scheme similar to this, but for the middle classes, at King's College, University College, and others, in opposition to a proposed college on the exile system, which has been set on foot by a gentleman sincerely devoted to the cause, but being one of the unsuffering five-sensed, and biased from long connection with and as the director of one of the schools on the old plan, he has not taken that larger view of the inevitable results of the unsocialising system he advocates.

It might be said I have omitted the sustaining influence the blind may derive from reading the Scriptures in relief type. If the blind have not sufficient opportunity of action the mind will collapse, and with this collapse will decline the pleasure of reading those sentences which are the most lively mementoes of the opportunities of action and conduct which we desire, but are denied; for the helm that is so powerful when the vessel has steerage way, is useless when the ship is becalmed. Besides, the contending systems of relief type must be examined and advanced to one of greater perfection; but this will never be till the private interests of partisans for a particular system, and sighted partiality for the old alphabet, invented for and adapted to the eye, no longer interfere with the sole and ardent wish of the blind, for which they are ever contending with sighted opponents,—*an alphabet more philosophically adapted to perception through the finger*. Sighted teachers and amateurs appear never to have imagined the

possibility of the increased alteration of the shape of the sentient part of the finger, from the section of a smaller curve in childhood to a much larger or flatter state in matured life. This oversight will account for so many not reading in after life, whose little fingers in early years dipped into, traced, and distinguished forms and peculiarities afterwards impossible.

It does not fall to the lot of every blind person, as it is too commonly conceived, to feel the force, the animating and sustaining influence, of that inner light of which Milton boasted, and which he so pre-eminently enjoyed. Had Milton been left in the isolation, silence, and darkness which so many of us too well and have too long known, without the opportunities of the import of impressions through the ear by reading and conversation with such men as were worthy of Milton's acquaintance, as well as the opportunities of the export of will, by the ready writer recording faithfully his thoughts, and the efficient friend willingly and faithfully executing his wish, we should indeed have had a very different style of composition from that which is now the boast of our country. How few blind, especially those in adversity, can, like Milton, boast—"I find my friends even more than ever kind; they are my consolers, mourners, visitors, and assistants: those of the highest consideration in the republic do not desert me."

To these health-sustaining influences may we attribute much of the unfailing vigour of Milton's mind; and in reviewing the life and character of James Wilson, it is pleasing to observe how unfailing attention and the enlightened and well-directed benevolence of his equals and superiors, tended in a corresponding degree, their position and education being considered, to develop, cheer, and elevate the mental powers, and to direct the manly efforts of the orphan stranger in Belfast.

A leading feature in the character of James Wilson is his earnest and sincere sense of religion; and an amount of such genuine confidence and benevolence gained from the busy, the useful, and well-conducted intercourse with the good and the benevolent in daily life, could never have been acquired in the solitary cell of an exile establishment. One of the committee of the Blackfriars-road School, the companion of a blind nobleman, attributes the freedom, the confidence, and dignity with which the blind pupils of Barcelona move through the streets to the native spirit of the Spanish character; whilst I attribute it to their living in their own homes, and the necessity of their daily going to the public school, where they are socially educated, and not isolated and locked up for a month, or months together, within the narrow confines of their establishment. "There is a degree of cheerfulness and vivacity about the Spanish blind that surprised me; they seem less helpless than their northern brothers in affliction."*

* "An Inquiry into the Musical Instruction of the Blind," p. 3. Mitchell, Bond-street, 1855.

Had any one met Wilson on his rounds, my blind friend Mr. Cockburn, walking from Edinburgh to Glasgow in a day, or Joseph Strong, the blind musician and organ builder, walking from that city to London, one hundred years since, to visit the blind organist at the Temple Church, Mr. Stanley; or had any one met, a few months since, the blind Thomas Scholfield, on his walk from Lancashire to London, they would not, in either case, have met with less courage and confidence in the northern than the writer observed in the blind of Barcelona at the present day.

The observation of James Wilson on the ill effects of trusting to music as a means of support for the blind, and his reasons for discontinuing it, are well worth the serious attention of all who are so eager to force that art on every one who has lost his sight. The warning of the chaplain of the Blackfriars-road School, St. George's Fields, in a recent report, should be read and attended to, as well as another warning from that genuine friend of the blind, Dr. Howe, of Boston, who reminds the blind and their friends that after the novelty of the wonder is over, the blind will always find "that their music as well as their mattresses will only fetch market price." Another event worthy of notice in the life of James Wilson, because of its importance, was his matrimonial alliance. Some adopt the Malthusian view from ignorance of what the blind have done and still do towards supporting themselves and large families, who, in most cases, it will be found, have proved good and useful members of society from the strength and sincerity of the *home ties, truth speaking*, and confidence in others in which they were trained and reared. Some adopt it, and ignore truth for the convenience of self; others, that property might be nursed and taken care of for a sighted successor. To any one inquiring into the history of the blind, no one truth will be more frequently forced on his conviction than this, that most of the distinguished blind owe the rank they have attained, and the knowledge and confidence they have acquired, to the faithful and watchful wife, ever communicating truth herself, and a constant check on falsehood, deception, or trifling from others. The example of the wife, and her control over others, contributed much to the knowledge, confidence, and success of Hubert, Pfeffel, and Delille, of Blacklock, Metcalf, and Rushton; more especially, in our own day, of the blind and paralysed historian, Augustin Thierry.

On page 59, after describing the external objects of nature, and the pleasing effects of their beauteous form, proportion, colour, their varied relations, as well as their suggestive influences on the mind, he concludes the whole in the following words:—"But to the blind these pleasures are unknown; the charms of nature are concealed under an impenetrable veil, and the God of light has placed between him and silent but animated nature an inseparable barrier."

Although this assertion is perfectly true as to the state of most of us, who day after day feel our way alone from point to point with much labour and great difficulty, and to whom the streets of the crowded city, as we pass through unrecognised and unspoken to, are but the paved paths of a dark and noisy, but barren waste : yet the case is very different, and the thorough darkness can no longer be said to be complete, when we perceive, through the ear, by the eye and voice of an intelligent and truth-speaking friend. I am inclined to think that the proneness of too many to be ever quoting Milton's pathetic description of blindness has a great tendency to make people believe our incapacity to be far greater than it really is, besides the certainty of suppressing rather than of encouraging the idea of the possibility of compensation through the other senses at every moment of our existence, whenever the benevolent and sincere are willing to give one of those short, precise, comprehensive, and direct sentences which make us for the moment forget the want of the glance of the eye. It was by such that Wilson himself must have stored his mind ; that Holman collected the materials for his travels ; that Saunderson formed those clear conceptions of objects, their form, magnitude, distance, and their relations, as well as of light and colour, by which he was enabled to be the first to explain, from his chair, Newton's theory of light and colour. It was by such aid from his fellow-creature that Hubert made his observations on bees ; that the blind camel-driver learned to convey in safety his caravan ; and that my late friend, the blind Cuthbert, was enabled to cast, mould, figure, and polish the specula of so many reflecting telescopes so as to render them perfect, aided only by the eye, mind, and voice of his constant friend till death, the late Mr. Smith, of Lambeth, who had no other duty to perform than to describe the nature and defect of the image of an object at a known distance, which by his next visit was almost certain to be corrected.

Not only would the liability to accidents, such as Wilson describes at the canal and at the well, be diminished almost to safety, but in a thousand other instances the blind would find the advantage of wearing on the hat or some other conspicuous part, a piece of plated copper or silver with the word "blind." Till of late, it was my custom to walk through the streets without any such notice, which rendered my progress, in the crowded parts, a continued struggle, or running foul of others, of ill-conditioned remarks and of apologies, perhaps unheard. Since I have adopted it, the change is so great, from the marked attention and civility, that I pass through as if the streets were almost empty. 'Tis true I miss those impressions, not altogether unpleasant, of jostling in the crowded street, which relieves the barrenness of the apparently uninhabited world ; but there is some compensation and a feeling of gratitude when one reflects that its absence is due to all-pervading benevolence. The blind and the deaf and dumb should not hesitate to bring into general use a dis-

tinctive badge which effects so much good. It will soon be treated with the same respect as spectacles or other instruments to remedy serious imperfections, and after a little time, friends would object to walk with those thus distinguished as little *as with those more strangely and needlessly decked, if not disfigured, in the streets of the present day.*

From the reviews to which I have before referred, no one would imagine the "Biography of the Blind" had been written with that high intent from so deep a conviction of its necessity as evidently animated its author. At page 97 he gives good and sound reasons for undertaking the collection of the lives and labours of the numerous blind who have existed at all ages and in every country. "I thought," writes Wilson, "that, if these were collected together, and moulded into a new form, it might not only become an amusing but a useful work, so far as it would show what perseverance and industry could do in enabling us to overcome difficulties apparently insurmountable." . . . "My chief object was to prove the energy of the human mind under one of the greatest privations to which we are liable in this life." Few works can be more amusing to those who read the exciting and the interesting for the mere enjoyment of pleasurable perception or transient reverie; but to those who seek books of more serious import, which call into action the higher faculties of the mind, by informing them of the opportunity where duty and responsibility can find its work, every reader of it, after a little reflection on our condition, our capacity for and right to more elevating treatment, will pronounce this volume to be one of standard excellence, and of *more than national worth.*

Of the first and third editions I have never met with a copy; but of the second, and especially the fourth, I have purchased many. It has been my constant practice, through the kindness of friends, to pick them up at second-hand shops or book-stalls, and to transfer them to those friends or families of the blind where they are always appreciated, or to libraries, or to the more sincere and enlightened, where and on whom they are likely to exert a beneficial influence hereafter. My chief motive in attempting this analysis of the life and labours of Wilson, is the hope that it may be the means of rescuing from that state of obscurity into which at present it appears doomed to lapse, a volume of such essential importance to the welfare of the blind, by proving, not only to relatives and friends, but to the country at large, if the blind have done so much hitherto by unsuspected talent and individual effort, that a more general recognition of their capacity and right ought to lay the foundation of a more general scheme for their rescue from the low philozoic treatment which too many attempt to defend as sufficient. For alms alone, and animal comforts, however liberal the supply, and kill-time amusements,

are but *philozoic* treatment. But to arouse the intellectual powers, and awaken the gratitude of man, his social affections and higher aspirations, the treatment must be *philanthropic*.

In the fourth, or more complete edition, now out of print and difficult to be met with, a work of 300 pages 12mo, there are fuller biographies, short sketches or notices of between 50 and 60 intelligent, highly educated, or illustrious blind, a complete and sufficient answer to the question the blind are doomed to hear perpetually dinned into their ears in a tone of melancholy and withering wail, quite sufficient to warn them that such speakers will never be in the van of those who struggle to advance their claims and arrest their degradation. One would almost imagine that the ears of Milton himself must, in his darkness, have been sometimes infested with the calamity-stop of the human voice, ever on the swell, or he would not have given utterance to that well-known phrase of the "scrannel-pipe," which appears to be the only one employed when a certain class put the question, which we not seeing suppose to be accompanied with ominous nod and corresponding look, "Oh! what can the poor blind do?" If such would read Wilson's "Biography," they would learn the progress made in the highest sciences by Didymus of Alexandria, blind from infancy; by Nicholas Saunderson, the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge, next in the chair to Whiston, the successor to Sir Isaac Newton. They would read of the accomplished Dr. Blacklock, the mason's son, and of John Gough, of Kendal, whose accurate and precise language might have had much to do in the formation of the characters of those accurate observers and sound reasoners, once his pupils, but long since national instructors; for in a note to the 78th page we learn that Dr. Whewell, of Trinity College, Cambridge, Mr. Dawes, of Downing College, fourth wrangler in his year, Mr. King, of Queen's College, senior wrangler, Mr. Gaskin, of Jesus College, Cambridge, senior wrangler, and Dr. Dalton, of Manchester, had all been pupils of this well-known and highly esteemed blind schoolmaster of Kendal.

Homer and Milton, of course, are fully noticed, and Leonard Euler, the philosopher and mathematician, whose property in Prussia was respected by the express order of the Empress Catherine at the time her soldiers were carrying havock to, and not respecting that of any one else. The lives of Zisca, the blind patriot and soldier of Bohemia, whom the Emperor Sigismund could not subdue, and John, the blind king of Bohemia, faithful till death to his motto of "Ich Dien," are amongst the worthies herein enumerated; whilst, at the same time, truthful pictures are drawn of those who have done much and laboured hard in less and not immediate danger. Edward Rushton, of Liverpool, the friend of the slave, the poet, and projector of the first school for the blind in

England, that of Liverpool, in 1791; John Metcalf, blind from infancy, who, amongst other labours, measured the ground by the inclination of his foot, contracted for, and made roads over the Derbyshire hills; rode his own horse, and won at a race; raised Colonel Thornton's troop, and was present as his trumpeter at Cul-loden, during which latter event he had the greatest blessing of a blind man, a wife, who, as she awaited his return, felt confident that her blind husband would do his duty, if not succeed, in every enterprise he had the confidence to undertake. From this book also the reader will learn—more especially from the copy of the inscription on his monument—that the blind physician, Dr. Hugh James, of Carlisle, was not reproached for his determination not to decline into amusements and occupations that must inevitably have induced mental deterioration, but that he was aided by the opportunities of continuing in useful and elevated labour worthy of his previous position and education, and that for a number of years, like Dr. Mure of Edinburgh, he was justly esteemed for his skill in the practice of his profession after he became blind: the proficiency and just estimation in which were held the two chemists, natural philosophers, and lecturers, Dr. Henry Moyes and Mr. Davidson of Dalkeith, the latter of whom in his blindness was a worthy and favourite pupil of Dr. Black and Dugald Stewart. The high power of perception by touch, and the skill and accuracy of the hand of the blind, are here ably proved in the biography of Jean 'Gonelli, whose marble statue of Cosmo I., Grand Duke of Tuscany, and other successful efforts, are to be met with in the Museums of Florence and Rome; one or two casts of which, if brought to this country, and exhibited at the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, would do much to remove public prejudice, which denies opportunity, and would teach parents and relatives not to check and smother the endeavours of the struggling blind. Many are the instances recorded in this volume of musicians, both as skilful performers and erudite composers; of blind mechanics, especially of musical instruments, such as Strong, the organ builder of Carlisle, Kennedy, and others, and the blind Talbot, the inventor and manufacturer of the Irish Union pipes. The old Irish bards are not forgotten—Turlagh Carolan, Henry the blind minstrel, and Denis Hampson, who tuned his harp just before he died, at the age of 110 years. Wilson has also mentioned the lives and labours of many blind clergymen and others, whom blindness has not prevented from continuing their career, and some of the highest and most responsible duties of life.

In this imperfect analysis I believe I have given sufficient to prove that this important volume ought not to be allowed to lapse into obscurity, but that its reprinting should be encouraged, and that a copy ought to find its way into every public and parochial library, and that families who either have or have had the

blind in their circle, ought to encourage the dissemination of and familiarity with those books which give an impulse to the simultaneous education of society, to understand, receive, and assist the blind in their endeavours to be useful, independent, and not in the rear of, and estranged from, their equals in birth and education. Should such a work reappear years hence, it would not be difficult to follow it by another of the useful blind of our own day—of Alexander Rodenbach, the blind member of the Chamber of Deputies for Belgium, who, in 1836, introduced, and succeeded in establishing the law by which all the blind, and deaf and dumb of that country are entitled to education; of Louis Braille, the inventor of the alphabet now used in France for writing and music; of Moon, of Brighton, whose printing-press is ever at work; of Plateau, the blind philosopher of Ghent; of poor Moncrieff, the dramatist, who, after having amused hundreds of thousands with between two and three hundred acted dramas all from his pen, is allowed to wear himself out in the ungenial solitude of the Charter-house; of Edmund White, the once railroad guard, but now blind poet, whose young children are educating themselves by their endeavours “to trace the thought of their father ere it vanish in the thinking;” and of Frances Brown, whose poetry is too well known to need remark of mine.

James Wilson died a few years since, but of what disease I know not. This important point, relative to the blind, has not yet been sufficiently noticed. In all future records, however, I trust this fact will be recorded, as, when collected, I feel assured they will throw much light on the diseases to which we are liable, not so much for the purpose of suggesting a cure as their prevention. The diseases of which the blind die, and from which they suffer long before death, are, physically, those resulting from indolence and inactivity—from the absence of object and motive—and, mentally, those of impoverished, imprisoned, and unemployed mind, or that irritability from incapacity when the needed information is designedly or unintentionally withheld; or the constant irritation of thwarted will, the lot of those who are in the power of others, especially the selfish and their inferiors. It is, therefore, imperative on every sincere friend of humanity not to evade a duty by denying the existence of an evil into which he has never inquired, but to promote inquiry, that those sufferings may be relieved, and those pernicious influences averted that embitter and shorten, whilst they pervert the design of mental life.

An inquiry has never yet been made, but I trust it will not be long before it will, into the number of blind who become insane and end their days in lunatic asylums. There are two in Hanwell; several, I believe, at Colney Hatch; one, if not more, at Northampton. A little reflection on those causes which lead to insanity in the blind will point out the hopelessness of

cure when once their imprisonment is aggravated by such ungenial and irrational companionship. In the sighted insane the excessive action of morbid and unbalanced imagination withdraws attention from the outposts of observation, or the five senses which take cognisance of the objects of the external world; any attempt to attract either of them by their appropriate stimuli fails; but any indication of attention, especially when sufficiently continued, affords the groundwork of the principal hope for counteracting and diminishing the excessive action within; but, should this point not be attained, "*vires acquirit eundo*," and the imaginative powers gaining head, like the fly-wheel detached from the wholesome resistance and restraint of the machinery, it whirls itself to destruction, and becomes an irrecoverable wreck.

During the waking hours of the blind some one or more of the mental faculties must always be engaged; and when, by long exile and the decline of friendship, or the death or the departure of friends, and with them the means and opportunities of action, then will aim, object, and ambition decline also. The blind in his solitude is conscious of the constant whirl of his imagination on useless trifles and impossibilities, till in the end he become as imbecile or insane, from the want of the object to attract, as the insane do from the subjective disinclination to be attracted by the object.

The modern Socrates, as he was called, Moses Mendelssohn, when his mind became bewildered and almost unbalanced by intense and prolonged abstraction, used to correct the subjective derangement by seeking the attraction of an external object. To this end he looked from his window, and set himself to the task of counting the rows of tiles on the old-fashioned, lofty, and high-pitched German roof of his neighbour's house, which never failed to restore the desired equilibrium. This bewildering tendency, so painful and pernicious to the mental powers of the isolated and neglected blind, is often felt by that highly educated deaf, dumb, and blind girl, Laura Bridgeman, of Boston. Dr. Howe gives the following instance in her own words. The *solecisms* of her composition must be understood to result from her style not being sufficiently corrected *by hearing conversation*. "I cannot stop to think" (cease thinking): "why cannot I stop to think? Does Harrison stop to think?" The last question was put to ascertain if Harrison, the governor of Massachusetts, who had just died, now *ceased thinking*.

In the long courses of lectures on the practice of medicine, as well as those on surgery, generally extending from October till March, there never has yet been found time, so far as I can learn, to give the least attention to blindness and deaf mutism, as prolific sources of serious and often fatal disease, not only to the body but to the mental powers. This omission ought not longer to be neglected: for, although the field of medicine is so extensive that

double the time could be well employed by a competent professor without exhausting the subject, yet is there often, during the time before named, many a lecture delivered of less importance to science, the happiness of individuals, and the well-being of society, than would be two such ones; as one devoted to the hygienic and curative treatment of the blind, and another of the same character on the treatment of the deaf and dumb: and those who would continue to elevate the character of the English surgeon to a rank worthy of the followers of Hunter and Abernethy, to such a point as Mr. Joseph Henry Green, Mr. Newnham, Sir Benjamin Brodie, and others have so ably led the way, must no longer ignore, in their treatment of the diseases of the organs of sight, hearing, and speech, the existence and claims of the human mind when imprisoned by defect or imperfection of these necessary means for mental circulation, for the constant alternation of the import of the elements of thought with the export of the will in speech or other muscular action. Too often has it been the custom of many who treat diseases of the eye, when they have failed to keep open that important channel of communication, to think no more of the mind they have left imprisoned than the undertaker, when screwing down the coffin, thinks of the destination and future condition of the soul.

In the investigation of and in dogmatising on the diseases before alluded to, care should be taken not to confound the consequences of blindness with its causes. Although many of us may have the "strumous diathesis," so frequently hinted with such tender pity, yet I am convinced that enlightened inquiry will prove that the results of ignorance, selfishness, and neglect, as manifested in the bodies as well as the mental powers, weak, stunted, and undeveloped from the want of the appropriate stimuli and adequate object, inducing, as it does, predisposition to bad health and inability to resist those agencies which produce disease, are often mistaken for and confounded with the "strumous diathesis."

Nor are these evils of neglect or ignorance confined to the blind individual alone, as in many other cases it becomes an un-failing source of other social evils which multiply themselves. When the plan pursued is that of making a market of his calamity rather than of his intellect, social degradation, mental decline, and bodily disease are certain to follow. And he is not the only sufferer. It brings down the shunned family also, especially those who devote themselves the most faithfully to his fortunes. The plague spot of private is as terrifying as that of public pauperism. On the other hand, a very little inquiry into the present state of the blind will prove the same as Wilson's "Biography," that where friends or strangers devote themselves to the elevation of the intellect of the blind, they not only elevate the man himself, but his family also; and every one so aiding is repaid by the self-elevation his bene-

volent exertions have secured. Thus we discover that by far the greater number of the most distinguished blind have sprung from the least wealthy and most necessitous classes. Forced to make some endeavour, and their efforts ably seconded by their equals and superiors to still higher enterprise, so soon as the existence of unsuspected powers have been made manifest, they, as in the instances of Saunderson, Blacklock, Metcalf, Rushton, and a host of others, have all risen, and some, especially Rushton, have left their families on the road to a high and honourable career after them. But, if we look to the state of the blind of the middle and more wealthy classes, we shall find, with the few honourable exceptions of Thierry, Rodenbach, Arago, Hayter, and some others, that they are for the most part doomed to waste of life and useless amusements; and that, either from a squeamish kind of delicacy, selfishness, or family vanity, they are denied the means and opportunities of mental development; in fact, they are cheated out of the privileges of life. To those who are so very fond of praising those painted sepulchres, or national oubliettes in which they would wish to imprison the blind for the rest of their lives; and where such people, say the blind, can enjoy the sympathy of each other's society, leaving out of the question age, rank, congeniality of mind, and previous education, I would ask, if men, and suffering from paralysis, confirmed dropsy, or any other organic disease, how they would like to be banished, *leper-like*, from the homes and circles which their parents had built up for them, or which they themselves had acquired by their own exertions when blessed with health in the days of health and prosperity? how they would like to be banished from the cheerful intercourse of life and be consigned to associate only with those similarly diseased? Or, if females, and suffering from cancer, how they would like expulsion from home, and the doom of contemplating in a cancer hospital the various stages of the disease which is undermining with incessant pain the powers of their own constitution. The blind of England turn with gratitude to America, where a very different style of doctrine prevails. Dr. Howe, of Boston, in his Report to the Governor and State of Massachusetts, thus writes:—"A comfortable home! Would there were such for every blind man! *But be it remembered it must be such as would be a comfortable home for a seeing man.* Now, there never has been contrived, and there never can be contrived, any institution and community to meet the wants of the social nature, and gratify the yearnings of the soul, as does the institution of the family ordained of God. No other calls into play so many faculties and sentiments of the human mind and heart; no other elevates what is low, and purifies what is selfish. Everything within its habitation, from hearth-stone to roof-tree, becomes endeared to the indwellers by common interest

and common cares; woman spreads around her softening influence; love, sanctified by marriage, becomes spiritual; children celebrate in it the joyful immortality of youth; brothers and sisters are ever wearing within its walls the tender ties of affection, which prepare their hearts for wider sympathy with mankind, while, by continually drawing on the fountains of parental affection, they prevent them from being chilled into selfishness even by the winter of age. *The family, indeed, furnishes the true elixir of life, and prevents the race from growing old.*

“The blind man may not be able to assume any of these tender relations in his own person; but, surely, for this very reason, he should not be left in cold isolation of the heart, but have his affections and his sympathies kept alive and warm by surrounding him with the genial atmosphere of domestic love. He has more need than others of the comforts and joys of domestic relations. His infirmities increase, not lessen, his desire for them, and increase, too, his capacity for their enjoyment. In all that regards his moral nature and his social affections he has capacities far higher than the deaf mute—higher even than those of ordinary men; for, while his infirmity does not lessen the strength of those affections, it increases his need and his desire for their exercise and enjoyment.”

When the site on which now stands the palace of the Louvre was occupied by a fortified royal château, then standing without the walls of Paris, the blind had erected in the adjoining wood of Garenne their celebrated asylum the *Quinze-vingt*; and in May, 1269, the benevolent Louis IX. contributed to their support by the following grant, the original of which is still preserved in the archives of that ancient fraternity:—“*Trigintur libras Parisienses annui redditus ad opus potagii dedimus ac concessimus.*” Not many years since the well-known Mr. Charles Day made a provision by annual pensions of from £12 to £20 each for such as did not possess an income of £30 a year. The number of us thus assisted is 273; but those who will take the trouble to read some facts relative to the blind, but little known, in the preface of Mr. Edmund White’s poem on blindness, will find that, on a lady applying for him for the pension, the secretary informed her by letter that there were already 2,500 applicants on the books waiting for vacancies. More than once has the question appeared in the newspapers:—“What has become of the money which Mr. Day left to build an asylum for the blind?” Mr. Charles Day himself was blind, and felt so keenly the cruelty of such exile establishments, that not only in his will, but in conversation with those three friends to whom he entrusted the distribution of this charity, he often said, “Not one sixpence to be spent in bricks and mortar to build a prison for the blind; they are imprisoned quite enough already.”

It has been my practice since my blindness to attend public

meetings where the cause of the blind has been advocated, and when opportunity has offered of listening to sermons preached in their behalf; but I have never left any one of them without a painful feeling of depression, as each succeeding instance warned me how little our condition, capacities, wants, and inevitable future were understood by our well-intentioned advocates. It makes us writhe with irritation to hear sighted but thoughtless amateurs talk of the happiness of the blind, as if the condition of transient animation, consequent on our being restored for a short period to human intercourse, were a sufficient proof of our being always in the same cheerful state during the many hours of silence, indolence, and gloom. As if at the commencement of the autumn the gambles and free range of the pointer in the field were a proof that he had been just as happy the many months preceding he had been chained to his box; or as if the hearty feeling of the famished vagrant at some hospitable board were a proof that he had been well fed during his previous life of exposure and poverty. I have even heard the chairman at an annual meeting at the Hanover-square Rooms speak of the happiness of being blind as a preventive to and a safeguard against those temptations to wickedness which assailed the mind through the eye. This requires no comment. It is far more gratifying to reflect how much we owe to Lady Holland, for bringing to our notice, in the memoirs of her father, the late Rev. Sydney Smith, the record of a sermon, almost, I believe, forgotten, which he once preached, and, with as much insight and judgment as zeal, truly advocated the cause of the blind. I have never heard it approached, much less equalled or surpassed. In volume the first of the "Memoirs," page 57, we read:—"But how beautiful were the serious moods of Sydney Smith! What a fine fulness and solidity they had, drawn from the strength and justice which we believe to have been the ruling sense of his mind, and tempered with the warmth of character of which we believe no man had a larger share." This will be readily admitted by all, but by none more than by those blind who shall have heard read through that sermon which elicited the splendid eulogium of Dugald Stewart. The following passages will prove the truth of my assertions:—"Consider the deplorable union of indigence and blindness, and what manner of life it is from which you are rescuing these unhappy people. The blind man comes out in the morning season to cry aloud for his food; when he hears no longer the feet of men he knows it is night, and gets him back to the silence and famine of his cell. Active poverty becomes rich; labour and prudence are rewarded with distinction; the weak of the earth have risen up to be strong; but he is ever dismal, and ever forsaken. The man who comes back to his native city, after years of absence, beholds again the same extended hand into which he cast his boyish alms; the self-same spot, the old attitude of sadness, the ancient

cry of sorrow, the intolerable sight of a human being who has grown old in supplicating a miserable support for a helpless, mutilated frame;—such is the life these unfortunate children would lead had they no friend to appeal to your compassion;—such are the evils we will continue to remedy, if they experience from you that compassion which their condition amply deserves.

“The author of the book of Ecclesiastes has told us that the light is sweet, that it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun.¹ The sense of sight is, indeed, the highest bodily privilege, the finest physical pleasure which man has derived from his Creator. To see that wandering fire after he has finished his journey through the nations coming back to us in the eastern heavens; the mountains painted with light, the floating splendour of the sea, the earth waking from deep slumber, the day flowing down the sides of the hill, till it reaches the secret valleys, the little insect recalled to life, the bird trying her wings, man going forth to his labour; each created being moving, thinking, acting, contriving—according to the scheme and compass of its nature—by force, by cunning, by reason, by necessity,—is it possible to joy in this animated scene and feel no pity for the sons of darkness? for the eyes that will never taste the sweet light? for the poor, clouded in everlasting gloom? If you ask me why they are miserable and dejected, I turn you to the plentiful valleys, to the fields now bringing forth their increase, to the freshness and the flowers of the earth, to the endless variety of its colours; to the grace, the symmetry, the shape of all it cherishes and all it bears; these you have forgotten, because you have always enjoyed them, but these are the means by which God Almighty makes man what he is, cheerful, lively, erect, full of enterprise, mutable, glancing from heaven to earth, prone to labour and to act. Why was not the earth left without form and void? Why was not darkness suffered to remain on the face of the deep? Why did God place lights in the firmament for days, for seasons, for signs, and for years? That he might make man the happiest of beings; that he might give to this his favourite creation, a wider scope, a more permanent duration, a richer diversity of joy. This is the reason why the blind are miserable and dejected, because their soul is mutilated and dismembered of its best sense; because they are a laughter and a ruin, and the boys of the street mock at their stumbling feet. Therefore, I implore you, by the Son of David, have mercy on the blind! If there is not pity for all sorrows, turn the full and perfect man to meet the inclemency of fate; let not those who have never tasted the pleasures of existence be assailed by any of its sorrows. The eyes which are never gladdened by light should never stream with tears.

“Another source of misery to the blind is their defenceless weakness of body; they can neither foresee evil, ascertain its

nature, nor avert its consequences. "If they venture a step from their usual haunts, every spot on which they tread is pregnant with some new danger; the earth seems to them a continued precipice. The blind, says a very excellent writer, who had himself never enjoyed the blessing of sight, the blind not only may be, but actually are, during a considerable period, apprehensive of danger in every motion towards any place from which their contracted powers of perception give them no intelligence. . . . Dependent for everything, except mere subsistence, on the good offices of others; obnoxious to injury from every point, which they are neither capacitated to receive, nor qualified to resist, they are, during the present state of being, rather prisoners at large, than citizens of nature.

"To estimate the advantages of sight, or of any other blessing coeval with life, we should call in the force of contrast, and consider what the condition of man would have been had it pleased God to create him without it. Devoid of sight, man would acquire his knowledge of the properties of bodies slowly, singly, and with extreme uncertainty: the sluggish current of his ideas would render him unfit for enterprise, his submission to every danger passive, or his opposition fruitless and confused. Some faint intelligence he would derive from sound; but he could receive few accurate notions from any greater distance than he could reach. From all that knowledge of bodies which we derive from an acquaintance with their affinities to light, and which to us are the signs of vigour and decay, salubrity and harm, youth and age, hatred and love, he would be eternally precluded; his mind must necessarily be exercised upon diminutive objects, because, though a long-continued series of touches would give him an accurate notion of each part touched, he could not, from such disconnected intelligence, collect the notion of a single individual mass. The works of God thus broken into baubles, and given to him bit by bit, what can this truncated, mutilated being know of the wisdom and power of his Creator? Open to him, now, the visible world; he penetrates into distance, space; he sees at one glance millions of objects; he views the breadth, and depth, and altitude of things; he perceives there is a God amongst the aged streams, and the perpetual mountains, and the everlasting hills."

The existence of this sermon, in which philosophy and religion are so beautifully blended, and the extracts from which I feel confident will be so welcome to the blind, I first learned from the memoirs recently published; but the extracts themselves which I have had so freely transcribed, are from the first volume of his published sermons, published by Cadell and Davies, nearly fifty years since.

In the same volume will be found another sermon, on a subject of far greater importance to the blind than many of the high-

mind and sincere suspect to be necessary. I mean his sermon on "Truth." It is not blindness which has reduced me to my present ruined and isolated condition, inasmuch as for blindness the Almighty has provided compensation in the unusual development of the remaining faculties, if the blind man be capable and willing, and if his former friends, relatives, and society will but adopt the course they ought to pursue. Neither is it the adversity of our family, for there were friends not only able and willing, but anxious to supply more than enough to have established me in some one of the many means by which I might have acquired self-support and independence. But amongst so numerous and influential a circle there was not one who would listen to, much less recognise the principle, and aid in any necessary scheme for keeping me in the society of my equals, for preserving those manly ties through which come information and the warning of opportunity, as well as by which those actions are transmitted and completed which are necessary for the restoration of the blind man to his proper rank.

If any philanthropist will take the trouble to inquire, I believe he will not find in our language, now, at a time when almost every thing else is to be found in print, and at so cheap a rate, a single volume, however small, as a guide to parents and relatives on their duties and the mode of treatment they should adopt towards the blind, or the deaf and dumb, although thousands may be had on singing-birds and silk-worms, and crochet or worsted work, or any other of the trivialities on which so much attention and thought is wasted, so greatly needed elsewhere, and which would so amply repay for their higher application. When the friend of the blind, and the deaf and dumb, Dr. Hubert Valleroux, commenced his benevolent inquiry with the advantages of sight, position, and all the libraries of Paris, he found this great deficiency, and has therefore ever since, and is at present devoting himself to lay the foundation of a better state of things. It is not, then, to be wondered at that, on my return from a voyage to Bombay in the summer of 1847, whither I had sailed at the same period of the preceding year, after my blindness was complete, that I was quite at a loss how to proceed for the future. The altered treatment of most of my former friends, who appeared to have made up their minds that I was no longer fitted for a useful position among them in the active and elevating duties of life, without reflecting on what must be the inevitable result, had I wavered in my determination, and had I given myself up to the useless amusements and time-killing trifles with which they would have had me be contented; the very low and pernicious treatment which exists in most families, that of avoiding all mention of blindness and its consequences, as if wrong and depressing, was an acknowledged principle of practice; and every attempt to gain information, which of course I

could only do through my friends, or such inferiors as I could educate and pay, was regarded as evidence of a morbid predisposition to dwell on my calamity, a weakness, of course, to be cured by banter, ridicule, or evasion of the subject; and the correctness of such a course was never doubted, since my former medical friends led the dissemination of this erroneous doctrine. Years of antagonism, estrangement from relatives, loss of friends, and exile from the society of my equals, and a number of other fatal consequences, have been the result, not from this evil alone, but from one which naturally grew out of such low views. Honest ignorance of a duty (of which I myself knew nothing till blindness forced on me its importance), the most obstinate routine to the possibility only of five-sensed views, mode of thought, shape of phrase, and course of action, however cohesive and almost impenetrable to reason, would never have reduced me to what I am, had not the want of larger views and a guiding principle, which necessitated a system of tinkering expediency, at last called in the aid of falsehood, and of deception so fatal till it became positive treachery.

No one more than myself felt the truth and justice of a quotation made by Lord Campbell from a speech of Lord Erskine:—"Some of the darkest and most dangerous prejudices of men arise from the most honourable principles. When prejudices are caught up from bad passions, the worst men feels intervals of remorse to soften and disperse them; but when they arise from a generous or mistaken source, they are hugged close to the bosom, and the kindest and most impassionate natures feel a pleasure in fostering a blind and unjust resentment." And not long since his Royal Highness Prince Albert, in his well-known address on the opening of the Birmingham Literary and Scientific Institution, pointed out the real source of our little progress in social questions of practical humanity, in a want of a more general cultivation of the mental sciences. I believe I quote his words *correctly from memory*. "There is a very great need in general education of more logic and metaphysics, of more physiology and psychology." If this be needed, as it really is, in general education, how much more is it necessary in those professions to which are entrusted the care of the mental powers, and the defence of the rights of the insane, and the imbecile, the blind, the deaf and dumb, and others of the disabled and the helpless class, whom too many of the healthy and the prosperous are too much inclined to thrust aside and into some *oubliette* out of the way of opportunity and enjoyment, but into what future they either do not or will not take the trouble to inquire or allow others to bring forward. The professions to which I allude are the law and medicine; and in those sciences I do not limit myself to the higher section, who have to do with the insane, the criminal, and others in public institutions. It is of far greater

importance to prevent their getting there by a higher tone of scientific knowledge in the home and family circle, such as every general practitioner, solicitor, and minister of religion can convey; for the aggregate of the influences of the latter on society far exceeds that of the former, besides having the vantage ground for the application of that preventive principle, *obsta principiis*.

Those who acted as my friends ten years since were either novices in the subject, or young men well qualified and rising in the different departments to which they had devoted their attention. They knew not the importance of taking into consideration the laws on which depend the health of the human mind, and the necessity of preserving and strengthening by ties and intercourse with the intelligent and business-like section of society; for the important value of these roots of support and fibres for nutrition is not dreamt of by the young and the hopeful, whose parents still live, whose patrimony is not expended, or whose "nos poma" career has never received a check. Not relying, therefore, on those by whom I was not understood, but from whom I ought to have had respect and aid instead of ridicule and reproach, I still persevered, and in the spring of 1852, on my return from a visit to the schools and the blind of France and Belgium, I was compelled to part with a youth I had been instructing many years to observe as accurately as the blind require, to take an interest in what he read, and thus understanding to write without feeling it irksome. The importance of this great loss, and of its sudden check to all mental exertion, was not perceived by any; or, if perceived, not admitted, for they appeared to consider that any boy of the same height, years, or weight would do as well; so little is that question of such vital importance to the blind ever thought of, the mental capacity of their companion or guide, to whose level of perception and action their own minds must be limited, cramped, and to harmony with which they must ultimately collapse. In the autumn of that year, having been disappointed and obstructed in one quarter, I directed my efforts to another; but here I was doomed to feel the fatal effects of that nursery system of manœuvre, and that sick-room system of plausible, delusive, and wily trickery so fatal to thousands of blind besides myself, instead of a frank and honourable admission from my equals, to which I was entitled by my position, straightforward conduct, both before and after blindness, the usefulness of my labours, and the correct motives which urged me on. Instead of such a frank and honourable admission that they had erred in their treatment, and that I might rely on more truth and respect for the future, a base and dishonourable advantage was taken of my blindness and my confidence to misinform and warp the judgment of a well-known professor, to whom it was known I intended to apply. The evil consequences of such a step were neither foreseen nor contemplated, or I well know it

never would have been done; but it came at a critical period, when but a little truth and a little intellectual aid would have carried me forward into a sphere of useful action, would have preserved the friendships I then possessed, and would have reclaimed many of the generous and sincere, who only left me from the prevailing idea of the uselessness and absurdity of my schemes. It came at a critical period, when the liberal supply of a friend, given with frankness and pleasure, and accepted with as much frankness and gratitude, was bridging me over a wide depth of difficulties. Explanation became necessary to justify the course I had taken, and explanation was exposure of the plague-spot of pauperism which made many recede, and deprived me of that intercourse which was necessary to life, besides bringing a stronger and unnecessary strain on friendship, which, if it cannot restore to self-supporting action, must, sooner or later, recoil from the apprehension of insatiable and exacting pauperism.

There are four or five, particularly, who well know the history of this affair, who have seen the blind man, once their equal in society, an imprisoned wanderer, struggling to find out the source and extent of the mischief, for no other purpose than to correct it, that he may have the assurance of truth for the future, the only basis on which the blind can ever attempt to act. For hope is not an instinctive feeling; it springs from confidence in truth; and where the blind are once betrayed, and no manly attempt is made to re-establish confidence, decline and ruin must be the result.

“A thorough conviction of the security derived from truth,” says the Rev. Sydney Smith, in the sermon before alluded to, “is no mean incitement to its cultivation. Falsehood subjects us to a perpetual vigilance; we must constantly struggle to reconcile a supposed fact to the current of real events, and to point out the consequences of an ideal cause; the first falsehood must be propped up by a second, and the second cemented by a third.” There are many who know how numerous have been the manœuvres, fabrications, and contrivances to exhaust, mislead, and silence me. These four years of struggling antagonism, to smuggle over and to conceal the consequences of this single false step, might and ought to have been prevented by one or two who, had they come forward without naming the person, and had they assured me of truth for the future, would have preserved my position and that of those connected with and depending on me; and I should have now been still on friendly terms and frequent intercourse, and receiving intellectual aid from those by whom I am now no longer noticed. Every falsehood must either be honourably met, or, as in reckless bill discounting, must be constantly renewed by those of increased magnitude, or in greater number, till an honourable compromise is almost impossible. The few friends I had left, unwitting of the consequences, have been tampered with, to delude me into quietism,

till the extent of my wreck terrifies the timid from offering the assistance which honour should suggest and Christianity supply.

I am fully prepared for the downward torrent of the future, for as yet I see not the point from which or where I might expect the necessary aid. Of those who have been looked on as my friends, not one man has ever come forward to offer that which is a blind man's right. In the scheme of Divine government the Deity has designed that the blind shall be restored by each and every one as opportunity offers and circumstances permit, giving truth through the ear to compensate for that which would have been perceived through the eye, by warning him of what he does not suspect, especially when it concerns himself, by informing him of what he wishes to know, by correcting his impressions when wrong, and verifying them when true. Let but such a plan be pursued, and it is impossible but that the blind will rise into a useful and self-supporting member of society. On the contrary, let the treatment be a slovenly disregard of, or indifference to, these principles, silly and misleading compliments, or reckless trifling, and the present degraded state of the blind will be perpetuated. I believe it possible to attain this in general society; but I cannot help asking how far the great and unusual proficiency of John Gough, of Kendal, was due to the confidence inspired, and knowledge imparted, by the more serious and untrifling tone of conversation in the Society of Friends, of which I believe he was a member. I am not an advocate of the principles of this respected section of the Christian community, but I have wished often for their style of serious attention and conscientious truthfulness instead of the shallow and insincere compliments which the so-called wonderful blind are obliged to endure. Evils, I have said before, multiply themselves, and are frequently aggravated in their progress by complication with other circumstances which, in themselves harmless, have greater weight from this very complication, or the juncture at which they happen. Like all educated blind of mature years, I see how thoroughly, I may almost say, blasted are the prospects of the blind from our cause being entirely in the hands of five-sensed amateurs, or officials insufficiently educated. To the reports of such bodies the country looks for information, and believe there is nothing to be learned beyond that which their scanty, superficial, and often misleading report supplies. I am not aware of a single efficient and struggling blind man or woman being on the Committee, or having any influence with any of these bodies connected either with schools or asylums. I am opposed to that system of exile education which, especially at the Blackfriars-road School, St. George's Fields, where, with vested property of nearly £100,000, such an expensive staff of officials and a yearly expenditure of or about eight or nine thousand pounds, so little good is done, but where much harm is, by the partial teaching of a trade or of some employment by which they cannot afterwards keep

themselves from becoming paupers on the parish or paupers on their friends. Neither is it right that they should be prevented from attending places of worship on Sunday such as they have always attended with their families before they came to the school, and to which they must afterwards return, either to harmonise with, or to end their days in the estranging discord of religious disunion. I am opposed to another constant practice of some of these exile schools, and some of their less enlightened teachers, who would keep the blind in the dark as to everything invented or put in practice in other parts of the country, or of Europe or of America, for their aid or development, and who would limit them exclusively to their own particular views and sighted prejudices. The relief type of Dr. Howe, of Boston, and that of Philadelphia, like that of the Bristol Society, will, I believe, be useful as a kind of transition alphabet or elementary for the young, because it is the A B C of their parents, and *who, therefore, can believe in the possibility of what they have learned*; but the constant endeavour of the blind to invent an alphabet for the finger, such as Louis Braille, whose alphabet has now superseded in France the dear hornbook forms of sighted partiality, or such as that of the blind Mr. Moon, of Brighton, must not be studiously ignored or obscured; and those who would write on "tangible typography" with truth, must not exclude from their list the angular type and the labours of James Gall, the Caxton of relief type to the blind of England, America, and their dependencies. Those who prefer it, can read or use the short-hand system adapted by Lucas, the phonetic system introduced by Mr. Frere, the Glasgow system of capitals only, or the system of the blind Mr. Hughes.

The ruinous institution, as it has been described by some, which I wish to have had, was a single room for the collection and diffusion of information, of books, and every kind of instrument which the blind require; a centre of communication with France, America, and the Continent, to which any one might have applied; and those who know me, know well how much truth would have earnestly and cheerfully been given without suppression or perversion, quibble or partiality, where any stranger in half-an-hour might have learned the experience of eight or ten years. Some, whose object has been to force their own views, and to limit me to their own schemes, in which has been entirely omitted any provision for the occupation and health of the mind, have conjured up absurd and mischievous views of an expensive institution I never contemplated. I did contemplate the possibility, when I had the room, with the certainty of one who could write legibly and read clearly, of undertaking any kind of agencies which would have been the commencement of a self-supporting business; but consultations and conversations, from which I have almost always been excluded, have given to my own scheme, and the whole of my conduct, a most dis-

torted and injurious character. No sooner is it attempted to put in practice new views than that indefinite and perplexing term institution is applied to it, and with it the idea of architects and well-paid staff, whether they understand or not the object in view. In fact, there are a certain class of minds who, had they been entrusted with the creation of the mollusca, would first have made the shell according to their own fancy, and then have crammed into it the first poor stray or unprovided-for being that happened to come within their reach. Such finality and fatalism are quite in opposition to the spirit of nature, which, if oftener observed, and imitated in charitable institutions, would effect more good, and prevent much cruelty. It is only by such a centre that the selfishness of the present exclusive and pernicious system, involving as it does so great an amount of retardation of intellect and of human misery, can have the slightest opportunity of being efficiently corrected. The necessity of some such movement will not be considered the less necessary by those who read the "Bienfaiteur" for February, 1855, a French journal devoted to the cause of the blind, as well as the deaf and dumb. In his remarks on the report of the Blackfriars-road School, in St. George's Fields, the Abbé Daras calls it "*la plus richement dotée du globe*," and states that "*le simple relevé des souscriptions forme chaque année un volume*." He afterwards thus criticises the report itself:—"Il serait à souhaiter que l'Angleterre comme l'Allemagne, suivissent, dans ses rapports, l'exemple des Etats-Unis. Un rapport Américain est un trésor intellectuel ; et en Europe les rapports ne sont que des colonnes de chiffres."

Another cause which has contributed much to reduce me to my present low and deserted state, is a narrow, bitter, and unchristian spirit of religious sectarianism. Early in life my father, conscientious and sincere, inculcated a spirit of inquiry, and taught me not only the right but the duty of private judgment. In obedience to this responsibility, I inquired for myself, and soon found my convictions more in accordance with those of my father than with the rest of any other relatives or friends. His liberality induced him to offer me the opportunities of either of the Universities, if I could conscientiously subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles ; but his honourable merchant spirit held in contempt, or worse, that laxity of principle which subscribes to what it does not believe to be the truth. As my friends were of the varying shades of the Church of England, I was often, in early life, in great doubt, in perplexity, what to believe, whom to follow, or where to go for advice ; for I clearly saw beforehand that I must first decide on adopting the religion of the person I should seek, as, of course, he would not recommend as true any doctrine but his own. Having early been well grounded in the essentials of religion, I saw there was no other course but to be consistent, and

rely on my own convictions. Whilst at Exeter and elsewhere the Established Church was my school, and in it I learned to adopt that which was sufficiently proved, and not to embrace that which was insufficiently proven. Although this has been my stay and support in many a day of struggle when I had sight, and in many a day and night of darkness since I have been blind, if the mind were not too stagnant, and I could by any possibility rouse and sustain a current of thought, yet it has been a great bar to my progress through life, and I have felt it much worse in the period of adversity and blindness. It might be said that this need not interfere with a medical man if he but understand his profession and perform his duty ; but it does interfere greatly, as too many know to their cost. Besides, we are brought too much in contact with a certain class of hysterico-impulsives and their abettors, who too frequently imagine they have a divine right to hunt up heretics and infidels, and who are not over accurate in their statements or logical in their reasonings, nor are they sufficiently attentive to that injunction of Jesus the Son of Sirach :—“ *Blame not till ye have examined the truth. Understand first and then rebuke.*” During many years of active life, it has been my good fortune to become acquainted with, and to have had my sincerest friends in persons whose convictions differed from my own ; and in endeavouring to take a wide, consistent, and complete view of Christianity, I never could limit myself to the nostrums of some narrow minds more than I could in medical practice to those of medicine ; and I always regarded that faith as an abortive or barren blossom which did not evince a ready predisposition to ripen into the fruit of practice. I have often been called a fool by some friends for meddling with the subject ; and I know well that a flexible or silent indifferentism would have procured me much greater aid ; it would have relieved me of many an anxious strain upon the mind years since ; it would have prevented some estrangements both before and since blindness ; it would have prevented the sanctifying on religious grounds of a retreat from a blind friend suspiciously due to some very different motive. Many an undertaking of acknowledged worth has either been foiled, or my efforts undermined or thwarted, by this sectarian spirit. It is well known how I have laboured for the blind and for their elevation ; it is well known that I have no sectarian object ; but, on the contrary, my views embrace the well-being and advancement of every blind person, in their home, their circles, and religion of their friends. Had I chosen to have made it sectarian and subservient to any partial or particular ends, I might, perhaps, have met with some aid ; but, such as they are, as I believe, liberal and just, I trust I shall yet meet with some whose spirit of greater liberality will aid me in the course I wish to advance. I can only now express my sincere gratitude to those who have through life, although differing from

me, given me credit for sincerity, reported me aright, and who have treated me with respect.

A disinclination to, and not seeing the necessity of separating myself from the community of my friends, of those whom I respected, and in fact of nearly all my acquaintances, might have given to my conduct the appearance of wavering and uncertainty, a want of fixedness of principle, of which some have not been slow to take advantage and sneer at. For my own part, I am thankful that I had the opportunity of making friends with the intelligent and sincere in many sections of the Christian church, instead of being cramped and narrowed into the prejudices and bitterness of any particular and exclusive sect. I never repented of the step I took at eighteen years of age; at some periods I slackened my inquiries, at others I pursued them with more earnestness, but I have not wavered, and if blessed with truth from my fellow man, and other opportunities and means necessary to the health of the mind, I shall, sustained by conscience, not—

“Bate a jot
Of heart or hope; but still bear up, and steer
Right onward.”

I can no longer suppress that which I feel to be a great injustice. Religion includes honour, and no end can sanctify the means if confidence be betrayed and principle abandoned. If my religious views are wrong, they ought to have been fairly inquired into first, and then, if any had chosen to retreat (the acts of former friendship, or other claims, having been paid off or not), they ought to have done so openly, and not to have kept on that ambiguous line of tactics which undermined or kept down whilst it assumed the semblance of a wish to advance and sustain. Feeling this influence keenly through life, it will explain many points which others might have conveniently smuggled over as due to eccentricity and a capricious waste of opportunity; and during these many years of adversity my schemes and efforts have not been selfish; so long as I could help others I did so, and if I have appeared to separate from my sisters, it was only when I saw they could not possibly keep me up, and I was determined not to drag them down. It is bad enough to suffer oneself, but no good is to be attained by the depressing effects of contemplating the unnecessary isolation and degradation of others, who, if set free, would rise and secure a better position for themselves. Let any one visit the *lodgings*, for some of them scarcely deserve the name of the *homes, of the blind*. Let them contemplate the man, and compare his position with that of his former relatives and friends, from intercourse with whom he ought not to have been an outcast; and if married, or with a sister, let them contemplate also the isolated state of the partner of his imprisonment, the narrow range of their perceptions,

thoughts, actions, and aspirations, and how the one has become shunned because, if her society be sought that of the other must be endured. The females of the family where there are blind must be on their guard against this unmanly trick of men—that of flattering or misleading them into wheedling or tricking their male relatives into a nonentity, and then leaving them with the burden for the rest of their lives, and its consequent exclusion from the opportunities and enjoyments of life. The blind females of a family are not so much banished from the society of their equals; but the blind man soon finds the fatal effects of an opposite mode of treatment, and the useless state to which he is reduced renders him a bore, which all attempts at compliments cannot conceal. If he sink into harmony he loses the manhood of his mind; and if he attempt to resist this decline, he must lead a cat-and-dog life, unless the manly portion of society aid him in keeping his mind in that state of useful activity which alone can make him a welcome companion with the intelligent, the useful, and refined of the other sex.

In an earlier part of my essay I quoted the writings of the Rev. Sydney Smith; and I now, with pleasure, select a passage from a well written essay on the human mind and its derangements by the Rev. James M'Kee, Chaplain to the Northampton County Hospital* for the Insane, and printed in their report for the years 1854 and 1855. I quote the passage because it contains those principles which ought to be understood and recognised as well as acted on and advanced by those who presume to interfere with or direct the management of the blind. Blind schools, so far as the house, the stores, and all the rest of the materialism, are undoubtedly the property of the different corporate bodies and societies, subject, of course, to the Commissioners of Charitable Trusts; but that enormous amount of human mind imprisoned in the blind and in the deaf and dumb, with its powers of elevation, its capacity for suffering, usefulness, and happiness—in fact, with its privileges of life—is not the property of any self-constituted directors or amateurs, to be stunted, driven wild, mismanaged, or blasted by incompetent supervision or inadequate opportunity. And I sincerely hope that those of higher education who enjoy the high privilege of influencing the councils of our country, and who have done so much for the slave, the insane, and the felon, will see the importance of extending that protection to the blind and deaf and dumb, by visiting their schools and, if necessary, by visiting their homes.

“I believe,” writes Mr. M'Kee, p. 14, “that every human being receives from his Creator, at the commencement of his

* I have adopted this term from the rev. gentleman himself. England, I believe, is the only country where a similar term is not used. To me the term expresses more of hope and the probability of cure.

existence, a mind endued with intellectual and moral faculties or powers, and capable of a high degree of intellectual and moral culture. But as the mind in acquiring knowledge carries on its operations by means of physical or material organs, the perfection of its operations and the number and character of its intellectual attainments depend, of course, upon the healthy state, due exercise, and mature development of those organs; and accordingly, *malformation*, or *diseased conditions* of the physical organs, impair or suspend the operations of the mind, and thus not only prevent the culture of the intellectual and moral powers, but also cause *imbecility, idiocy, illusions of sense, and insanity.*"

Now, since to sustain the mind in healthy activity there must ever be a just balance between the supply or import of perception and the opportunity for export of action, adequate exercise of the instrument of thought, and abundant supply of motive power, it stands to reason that, if these conditions, necessary to health, be disturbed or arrested by blindness, and its consequent imprisonment and inactivity, some one of the evils so clearly pointed out by the reverend gentleman must inevitably be our doom, and that it is to such writers and reasoners we must look for that aid and support which alone can avert impending wretchedness, and evils that, once gaining head, can never be removed. Towards the conclusion of his essay, p. 33, Mr. M'Kee thus writes:—"I trust it will not be thought by any gentleman that in what I have said in this report I have travelled out of the sphere of a clergyman, when they recollect that some of our universities, including that in which I myself graduated, make a knowledge of Locke's 'Essay on the Human Understanding,' Brown's 'Sketch of the Philosophy of the Mind,' Paley's 'Moral Philosophy,' Gisborn's 'Principles of Moral Philosophy,' Brown's 'Lectures on the Philosophy of the Mind,' Smith's 'View of Ancient Moral Systems,' Burlamqui's 'Natural Law,' and other works of a similar character, indispensable in all candidates for the degree of bachelor of arts who read for honours; that the *professors of mental and moral philosophy in our universities are clergymen*; and that in reasoning, as I have done, in defence of important principles *most intimately connected* with the subject of religion, from facts discovered by the investigations of anatomists and physiologists of the greatest eminence, I have merely followed the example of Bishop Butler, in his work on the 'Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature,' Archdeacon Paley in his work on 'Natural Theology,' the Rev. Dr. Reid, in his lectures, as professor of moral philosophy, on the 'Intellectual Powers of Man,' and many other clergymen."

Whatever may be the opinions of others, and but one opinion there ought to be, every intelligent blind man, as well as deaf and dumb, will look forward with gratitude and hope to the labours of

such men, and the students of such works, whether their sphere of future action be the church, law, or medicine, as magistrate or statesmen; for, as we are beaten down or allowed to lapse lower and lower amongst the ill-educated or less educated, our treatment becomes worse, and our danger of greater suffering and deterioration far greater; for, however benevolent any man or woman might be, their beneficence must ever be limited by their intellectual power and knowledge of the subject on which they presume to reason and direct, their moral energy and their sincerity, whilst their proneness to blunder and consequent certainty of doing mischief must ever be in proportion to their ignorance of the subject in which they presume to meddle, or their want of moral courage to execute and insist on that which they know to be right. If a portion of such or similar books were decided on as those to be read by candidates for honours in our medical and legal examinations, in our courts of justice we should sooner arrive at a clearer definition of what is responsible insanity, such as vice and crime, and what is irresponsible insanity, a form of derangement requiring a very different mode of treatment. Not only should we have a high class of men in our public appointments, but our homes would be influenced by the spirit of such advisers as the Rev. Sydney Smith and the Rev. Mr. M'Kee, as Mr. Recorder Hill and Dr. Howe, of Boston. There is another band collecting and growing into importance, from whom the blind and the deaf and dumb might expect much hereafter. Among those gentlewomen who will devote themselves to practical charity will be many who, whilst others devote themselves to that section of nursing which requires predominance of muscular labour, these will find themselves more at home in that region of thought which contemplates the possibility of a better kind of nursing for the restoration of the overstrained or unbalanced mind. When this other half of the human family shall be allowed to step forward and fill up the vacancies so long void or badly-filled in the different ranks and grades of active and useful life, it is to be hoped that so many hundreds, now allowed to sink into no one knows what below the level of their brothers, will have an opportunity of qualifying themselves, and of attaining a recognised rank, from previous study and practical acquaintance, as companions to those of their own sex whose minds have suffered, and require that aid, confidence, and consolation which can never be derived from that main strength and stupidity treatment too much in vogue. If the trained and certificated teachers are divided into three classes, with three divisions of gradation in each, why is not a similar scheme adopted for the benefit of the insane which would secure a higher class of female attendance and companions, and who would also be well qualified for many other situations in which a higher tone of thought and view than at present exists is greatly

* * Since these pages have been in print I have had read to me more than once the review in the *Times*, Oct. 16th, of Dr. Connolly's work on "The Treatment of the Insane *without Mechanical Restraints*," just published by Smith and Elder, and it is gratifying to find my views supported by that justly esteemed authority. "He" (Dr. Connolly), quotes the Reviewer, "approves with additional suggestions of his own (page 326—327) some proposals of theirs (the Lunacy Commissioners) which have not yet been carried out in practice. Especially, he desires a better training of the attendants; that they should receive diplomas, or tickets of registry, entitling them to situations; that a registry of them should be kept at the office of the Commissioners; and that, according to the Commissioners' own request, when an attendant is dismissed or leaves any situation for misconduct, the cause of such change should be regularly reported to them." A very little reflection should warn friends that the happiness of cure, or the misery of continued or perhaps aggravated derangement, depends more on the intellect and elevated moral character of the keeper or companion who has the insane person wholly in his or her power, and generally in his or her presence, rather than on the skill and humanity of the Medical Superintendent who may see the patient only for a few minutes in the day, and who, therefore, must or could be biased or misled by the statements of the attendant, bent on smoothing over or concealing the mischievous effects of a disease not sufficiently recognised amongst others *vested with power temporary*, as well as insane attendants—"the irritability of incapacity."

power

J. B.

required? If women take the lead in this movement, the men must follow.

In drawing to a conclusion this essay, which has grown to a greater length from the gradual and increased activity of thought as my mind became relieved of its heavy and oppressive burden of thought, congesting almost to stagnation, I must again refer to those circumstances which have in a great degree forced me to the public expression of so many opinions. Those who have never had the pleasing course of the amenities of life ever disturbed by painful publicity, or the disruption of the ties of family and friends, will be more likely to condemn than to understand; and those who have never known what it is to spend years in the too great silence, isolation, and darkness of blindness, with the scanty, precarious, and irregular supplies necessary to mental life, will not understand the hard task of dragging from the depths of memory facts seldom brought to the surface by conversation, so as to constitute a well-planned, regular, and consistent statement. If to this be added the bewildered and exhausted state consequent on almost ever reeling in doubt and distrust, suspicion and uncertainty, the consciousness of impaired health, too strongly evidenced by gradually approaching deafness, and the certain decrease of the means and opportunity of curing or arresting it; in addition to the approach of an unfavourable season of the year, which to a certain extent benumbs and blocks out sensation at another point, always leaving me in the spring less alive to external impressions each succeeding year, I believe it will be accepted by the generous and the just as sufficient explanation for the laboured or otherwise defective composition. I see before me perhaps years of unnoticed or disregarded isolation, without, perhaps, the hand to write, even if there should be the friend to read.

After three or four years of exhaustion in my endeavour to instruct boys, to render them capable of writing a plain and intelligible sentence, and almost always meeting with that ill-will that falls to the lot of those who attempt to instruct the ignorant, in addition to the evasion and low cunning which they vainly think they can play off on the blind without detection, the friend who has never failed paid for the return of the only youth with whom I have been able to make any progress, and whom I named as leaving me in the spring of 1852. But three years had made a great difference in my position, and things possible then are not so now; and although he has been constantly with me this last twelvemonth, a greater complication of evils and exclusion from that society which refreshes, invigorates, and gives hope to the mind—above all, the death, departure, or desertion of many friends, has prevented my securing that position I once might have done. The prospect of circumstances again compelling him to leave me to make a position for himself in life, though not in that in which he might have aided me with so much

success and usefulness to the blind, as well as the community at large, will again force me into a narrower sphere of action and existence. Educate more boys I cannot,—eight years of that wearing, exhausting, and now hopeless labour is quite enough, and with the homeless blind there is no inducement for the boy to stay, no hope of introduction after. I say homeless. In the year before this last, twelve boys left me, most, as usual, dismissed for falsehood or deception, and the others could not endure the solitude of residing with me in lodgings; of course I had no conversation with them, nor they for me. This is one of the evils I foresaw long since. The boy to the blind is of the importance that the nails are to the shoe of the traveller's horse. In my scheme for the future I years since foresaw this, but it would almost appear that those things which are not necessary to the sighted do not appear in their full force as necessary to the blind. With these evils threatening near as well as in the distance, I ask for more serious consideration for the state of the blind, and self-preservation obliges me to obtrude myself forward, unwillingly enough, for I know well that, when a certain line is past, however smooth appearances might be for the present, there is danger in the future. Had it been my good fortune to have had one or two I could name true to me, that would have been enough; but, if I am reproached at one time for not accepting the offer of my friends of a certain party who, it was said, wished me to go to America to make myself more thoroughly acquainted with the conditions and treatment of the blind in that country, when no such offer had ever been made or dreamt of, and then I am told by others that the same party will never aid me in any of my undertakings for the benefit of the blind; if I am told at an after period that some other friends would wish me to go to America for the same purpose, but that they thought I should not like to leave my mother at her age and in her state of health, and then soon after I learn from another quarter, from too much of a gentlewoman to tell a falsehood, that my friends would make me an allowance, but have nothing to do with my schemes, by which alone I can keep my mind in health; if my mind is distracted by these and fifty such contradictions from one person at a time, who never knows what other people have *said*, but exhausts me by asking for a repetition, and then reproaches me for wearing the same subject till it is threadbare;—I ask how is it possible for a blind man to enjoy either repose, confidence, or hope? These remarks would never have been printed, but I have no other means of sending facts and truth into those circles from which I have been most unjustly banished, where others can have their say, and to which, again, readmission seems impossible without the chance of introduction to any other. It is too often the blind man's fate; but would not be so if the sighted would discontinue to treat those blind in their power as their inferiors in intellectual

capacity, social rights, and moral aspirations, by denying them those very means by which alone these inalienable privileges of every man's life, whether blind or sighted, can be secured.

I have not forgotten the reproaches by which I was met and worried in those homes and families where once I was looked up to as the respected medical attendant, because I would not consent, at the age of a little more than forty years, to be imprisoned for the rest of my life in the Medical Almshouses on Epsom Downs, to associate only with those strangers who find too late, and when there's no return, that rooms, furniture, and rations, with juxtaposition to other disappointed, ruined, or disabled Pariahs of social and domestic life do not constitute a home. There was something like genuine humanity in the reflection of the American traveller, as he contemplated the inmates of an English almshouse:*

"The sick-rooms were marked with the same painful naked neatness. Old people disposed of to die, economically tucked up in rows against the walls, with no person to come near them, *except the one to nurse a dozen*, form a dreadful series. *Really there should be some things sacred from classification.* The fifth acts of dramas, like whole human lives, should not pass like the shelving of utensils that are one degree short of worthless. I stood looking a minute or two at an old man, whose only reply to 'Well; how are you now?' was a hopeless lifting and dropping of the eyelids; and I wondered whether a life was worth having that had such possible terminations in its dark lottery."

"Solitudinem faciunt et pacem appellant."

"Don't think of coming here," said one of the inmates of the Governesses' Asylum on Haverstock Hill, to a lady of good family, who thought of seeking her residence there, "it is little better than a genteel Union-house; there is everything that furniture and food can supply, but nothing to compensate for our being banished from the circle of our friends, and thrown together, at our advanced period of life, with perfect strangers, who have neither recollections, feelings, nor interests in common." If I were a Romanist, I could understand and be willing to seek admission to some one of the many monastic establishments congenial to my taste, where, according to their convictions, there is a daily routine of agreeable and elevating occupation, those of matured years and vigorous intellect forming the connecting link between those who are advanced in years and those who are in the process of education sufficient to insure consistency, harmony, and respect; but I would endure a great deal before I would consent to be imprisoned in any Protestant carcass of a monastery or its imitation, where the severities of the monastic establishment are forced on

* "Famous Men and Famous Places," p. 190.—Ward and Lock.

those who need most the home so truly portrayed by Dr. Howe, and where a fattening staff enjoy all the blessings of social life. Let any one, for instance, go to the Charter House, and inquire into the state and treatment of the five blind old men, each in his separate room, caring little for and seeing but little of each other, and having but little communion, perhaps, with the other seventy-five "reduced gentlemen," or at least supposed to be so. At ten o'clock their companion, if they can pay for one, or their relative, if they have one still true, must leave them, so say the monastic rules still in force for these poor old men. If either of the blind is ill in the night, and some are between seventy and eighty, he must get out of bed, strike a light, put his candle in the window, and if the watchman *should see it* he will call some one, perhaps the porter or a nurse from the sick ward; but if a young gentleman within the walls, whose residence Sutton never contemplated, should be ill, there are bells and nurses and efficient attendance. The monastic rules are broken through to allow a numerous and well-paid staff, to the number of some six or seven families and their servants, to enjoy all the blessings and refinements of domestic and social life, but one jot of which cannot be extended to those for whose happiness the charity was principally if not exclusively founded. With an income of from £25,000 to £27,000 a year, and the valuable property of fifteen acres of land, partly covered with buildings, in the very centre of London, surely some scheme ought to be devised more in accordance with our advanced state of civilisation, which now seeks to preserve and not to destroy home ties and claims for executing the sole objects of the founder's will—that of adding to the happiness of the declining years of eighty gentlemen who had felt adversity, and for the education of forty boys. Certainly more happiness could be secured them in their home and among their friends out of their share (*i. e.* two-thirds) of from £25,000 to £27,000 a year, and the proceeds of the sale of ten acres of land close adjoining Smithfield, still leaving five acres for the school.

"Although," says Hurlbut, "faith and hope abide in the human mind, yet greater than these is charity—and greater far than this favourite sentiment of the apostle is justice."

JOHN BIRD,

Member of the College of Surgeons, England,
and Day's Pensioner.

34, Newman Street, Oxford-street,
London, Oct. 1st, 1856.

STATISTICS OF THE BLIND.

ACCORDING to the census of 1851, there were in Great Britain, Ireland, and the British Isles, 29,074 blind: *i. e.*, males, 14,861; females, 14,213: viz., London, 2,305; the rest of England, 14,598; Ireland, 7,587; Scotland, 3,010; Wales, 1,403; British Isles, 171.

By the census of 1853 it was ascertained that the number of blind in France amounted to 38,662.

According to the last report of the Brighton Blind School, it has been computed that there were in existence from 10,000,000 to 15,000,000 of blind, and that 160,000 die annually, more or less *instructed and elevated*, or *neglected and degraded*.

Dr. Augustus Zeüne, director of the Blind Institution at Berlin, states that the proportion of the blind to the sighted increase as we approach the equator. The ratio of the blind to the sighted between the 50th and 70th parallels of latitude he states to be one in 1,056; between the 40th and 50th, one in 800; between the 30th and 40th, one in 277; and between the 20th and 30th, one in 100. The greatest part of our East India possessions lies between the 10th and 25th parallels of latitude, and the rate of blindness in a population of nearly 125,000,000 must be immense, all of whom, in addition to those in the West Indies, Africa, Australia, the Ionian Islands, and our North American possessions, have a right to look to the English government for inquiry, that the amount, nature, and extent of the evil might plead its own cause, and that the example of the British public at home might point out the most successful course to be adopted by those philanthropists, who would wish to extend the blessings of this hitherto neglected branch of civilisation to those afar off.

REPORT OF CENSUS, 1851: POPULATION TABLES II., p. 108.

The average proportion of the blind to the rest of the population of Great Britain is one in 975; but a much larger proportion of blind is found in the agricultural than in the manufacturing and mining districts. In the south-western counties, viz., Wilts, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall, and Somerset, there is an average of one blind in every 758 inhabitants. In striking contrast with these are the following:—

Yorkshire (West riding), one in 1,231; Cheshire and Lancashire, one in 1,167; Durham, one in 1,163; and Staffordshire, one in 1,083.

If a few benevolent persons in each county would contribute a few pounds, they may commence a free library of books in relief type for the blind of each county. It would be easy to find some gentleman in the county town who would undertake the duty of honorary secretary. This also might be made the means of obtaining, through private benevolence and zeal, that information

which was so scanty in the Registrar-General's Report of the Census for 1851, but which was so much more full and complete in the Status of Disease for Ireland. Whoever would wish for much accurate and well-arranged information on the subject of the deaf and dumb in Ireland, as well as the blind, will find it in Mr. Assistant-Commissioner Wyld's report, as above described, which can be obtained from any Parliamentary paper office, price 1s. 6d. There appears but little doubt that the interest awakened on the subject of the blind and the deaf and dumb in Ireland, and the greater copiousness of their inquiry and report, is due to the labours of Dr. Orpen, who, during a period of convalescence, many years since, educated one of the deaf and dumb, and by his success and zeal laid the foundation of that active spirit which now so generally prevails in Ireland.

The cause of the blind has been but little advanced, if at all, by poets, painters, or sculptors; their object generally in introducing a blind character is that of producing an affecting picture, by working up into misleading predominance helplessness, dependence, and incapacity. Romance writers have, for the most part, till of late, followed the same pernicious practice. Had some painter exerted his skill in the imaginative by portraying Minerva instructing Tiresias in the use of what ought to be translated "precious" and not "golden" wand, which she is supposed to have given to enable him to discover his way as well as the position and substance of things, it would have been more suggestive of possibility and capacity than all the skilful productions illustrating the equally fictitious account of the fate of Belisarius.

With such poets and writers, however, as I have before alluded to, the names of Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton and of Mr. Charles Dickens must not be included. I have never met with any other *sighted* writer, with the exception of the Rev. Sydney Smith, who has so thoroughly conceived and described the objectless state of vacuity in which we exist and move, and the consequent depression it produces on the mind, as the author of the following lines from Nydia, the blind girl's song in the "Last Days of Pompeii:—"

"Ye have a world of light,
Where love in the loved rejoices;
But the blind girl's home is the house of night,
And its beings are empty voices.
As one in the realm below,
I stand by the streams of woe!
I hear the vain shadows glide,
I feel their soft breath at my side,
And I thirst the loved forms to see,
And I stretch my fond arms around,
And I catch but a shapeless sound,
For the living are ghosts to me."

Very frequently have my attempts to make our condition better understood, that our objects, motives, and wants might not be so constantly misapprehended and misconceived, or misrepresented or thwarted, been met with reproaches for morbidly dwelling on misfortunes that cannot be either cured or relieved; and that the blind should be made to forget their blindness by distracting their attention, and cheering them with lively conversation on other subjects. The useless and dependent blind man is reminded of his blindness at every moment, when alone and indolent, and ever conscious of his incapacity; for it is only when capable, useful, and with rational grounds for the hope of a higher state of efficiency, and of the enjoyment of the benefits of exertion, that we are not depressed by the consciousness of blindness. We must, as a matter of course, yield to the caprices or fancies of those who notice us, who have us in their power for the time, and our characters for good or for ill afterwards; but

we often feel bitterly that jeering is not cheering ; neither are we benefited by that low and flippant style of sick-room tactics which, in difficult cases, or those beyond the discernment or skill of the practitioner, seizes on some symptom easy of treatment, and drags it forward into undue predominance, by which the more serious and urgent symptoms are thrown into the shade, or altogether ignored. Nothing cheers the blind so much, and leaves so great an amount of permanent and sustaining comfort as plain sincerity, however short the visit or the sentence, or however slight the promise made or the assistance rendered. Blind poets often allude to the evils consequent on neglected blindness ; but the full force of their expression is seldom felt by the unsuffering sighted. *Samson Agonistes* is often read or sung for the gratification of the five senses ; but very seldom or never studied for the evidence it contains of the possible sufferings of many thousand blind besides Milton himself, which a very little reflection and humanity would relieve, counteract, or entirely prevent.

Let any one reflect on that law of the human mind in obedience to which

“ *Aliquid agere semper appetit animus,*”

and they will understand how fully the truth of the following lines of Milton is felt by every blind man who, day after day, with decreasing opportunities of impression from, and of communion with, the external world of social life and life-sustaining activity, has nothing to contemplate but the gradual stages of his own mental deterioration and social degradation,—of passing through life, when it cannot be said we live ; when, if not a near approach to, we are on the certain road to that state in which many blind drag on a miserable existence, that of “having done with life, but not yet dead.”—

“ I seek
This unfrequented place to find some ease ;
Ease to the body some, none to the mind
From restless thoughts, that, like a deadly swarm
Of hornets arm'd, no sooner found alone,
But rush upon me thronging, and present
Times past, what once I was, and what am now.”

The following lines, reprinted from an American newspaper, are equally graphic. The last stanza, in which he describes the bewildered state of the higher faculties, giving up, or rather losing control, is too true to the natural course of events under such circumstances, but all of which might and ought to be averted.

BLINDNESS.

[This poem, written by one who was suddenly stricken blind by an accident, is taken from the *New York Literary World*.]

I.

THE golden shores of sunshine, round me spreading,
Refuse a beam of light ;
And fast my shattered soul is death-ward heading,
Wrecked on a sea of night !
There is no angry tempest flapping sun-ward
Its black wings through the air :
The ruin, in a calm, is hurried onward
Through channels of despair !

II.

Around me is a darkness, omnipresent,
 With boundless horror grim,
 Descending from the zenith, ever crescent,
 To the horizon's rim.
 The golden stars, all charred and blacken'd by it,
 Are swept out one by one;
 My world is left, as if at Joshua's fiat
 A moonless Ajalon!

III.

How long, O Lord, I cry in bitter anguish,
 Must I be doomed alone—
 A chain'd and blinded Samson—thus to languish,
 In exile from the sun?
 Or must I hope for evermore surrender,
 And turn my eyes on high,
 To find, instead of broad and azure splendour,
 A black curse on the sky?

IV.

Alas! as time sees gathering round me deeper
 The universal cloud,
 I feel like some wild horror-stricken sleeper,
 Who wakens in a shroud!
 Like some poor wretch who closed his eyes at morning
 Against the growing day,
 And finds himself, without a prayer or warning,
 A tenant of the clay!

V.

Farewell, farewell, spice-islands of my childhood,
 Where I have lingered long;
 Farewell the glories of the vale and wildwood,
 The laughter and the song!
 Farewell the sunny pleasures you inherit,
 For I am drifting forth;
 My helm deserted by my guardian spirit,
 My prow towards the north!

THE LIFE
OF
JAMES WILSON,
WHO HAS BEEN
BLIND FROM HIS INFANCY;
AUTHOR OF
ORIGINAL POEMS, HISTORY OF THE BLIND, &c.

“ But what avails it to record a name
“ That courts no rank among the sons of fame ? ”

BIRMINGHAM:
PRINTED BY J. W. SHOWELL, 26, UPPER TEMPLE-STREET.
1842.

TO THE READER.

BEFORE I introduce myself to the reader, I wish to call his attention to the following interesting letters :—

FROM ROBERT SOUTHEY, Esq.

“Keswick, June 30, 1834.

“I have read Mr. James Wilson’s account of his own life with much interest ; it is indeed a narrative which may very properly accompany the lives of those persons who, being blind, have nevertheless rendered themselves remarkable by their attainments, and thereby show how much may be performed by patient and ingenious industry under the most unfavourable and discouraging circumstances.

“This testimony is given in the hope that it may be useful to him in his travels.

ROBERT SOUTHEY.”

FROM CAPTAIN BASIL HALL, R.N.

“132, George-street, Edinburgh,
Monday, 10th July, 1837.

* * * * *

“Dear Sir,

“I have read your ‘Life’ with much interest, and I may add instruction, for it is always instructive to see that cheerfulness and contentment are the result of virtuous actions; and that generous and manly efforts in a good cause, though they may not always be crowned with what the world calls success, never fail, if duly persevered in, to secure that peace of mind, which is, after all, the best kind of success, even in a wordly point of view. But in such a case as yours, this perseverance requires no small faith in the principles upon which it rests.

“I have not had time to read your larger work, which my children have carried off to the country, but I shall go through it with attention, and I have no doubt with advantage as well as amusement.

“I return the copy of the ‘Life’ which you were good enough to lend me, and remain,

“With sincerest good wishes,

“Your most obed. humble servant,

“BASIL HALL.”

LINES AT PARTING ;
BY THE REV. THOMAS GRINFIELD.

“ Dear blind JAMES WILSON, think me not unkind,
If scarcely can I pity thee, though blind ;
Thy blindness is thy blessing. Had'st thou sight,
Ne'er had thy soul been thus enrich'd with light.
Ne'er had'st thou won thy thousand scatter'd friends,
Where *English, Irish, Scottish* ground extends.
Now is thy full-fraught memory a store
Of Biographic and Historic lore ;
Now the sweet Poets in thy bosom find
A living home, and revel in thy mind :
There, sage intelligence, and laughing wit—
There, truth and kindness, peace and patience, sit.
And pious Faith, twin'd with her sister Hope,
Holds to thine inward eye her telescope,
And shows the better world, where all is light,
That knows not blindness—day that fears not night.
—Evening, with thee, was wafted on the wing
Of converse, such as left nor stain, nor sting.
Long may'st thou *here* a blind-fold pilgrim rove ;
Blessing and bless'd ; while all that know thee, love ;
Then meet thy gather'd friends in one bright home
above.

“ THOMAS GRINFIELD.”

“ June 27th, 1842, CLIFTON.”

LINES BY THE REV. C. J. FYNES CLINTON.

“ Behold a man who long hath lived in night,
Illumin’d yet with more than common light ;
Illiterate—yet much in letters skill’d ;
Unread—whose mind with various lore is fill’d ;
And who, although he ne’er a book hath seen,
Yet long a vocal library hath been !
A good divine, with Scripture truth well stor’d,
Who ne’er o’er Inspiration’s page hath por’d.
Strange contradictions !—how to truth agree
These words, we learn from Wilson’s history :
In him we see a man whom God hath taught,
And in his soul a calm submission wrought.
A compensation for the loss of sight,
God hath bestow’d in ‘marv’lous’ inward ‘light’ !
God’s other gifts he hath *more* priz’d and us’d,
Because one *usual* gift hath been refus’d.
His mind—enlighten’d with no common ray,
Can trace *this* light to th’ want of light of day.
Let Wilson teach those bless’d with vision’s sense
How great the grasp of zeal and diligence ;
Before *their* pow’r hills vanish—vallies rise,—
Through Grace’s aid they can e’en reach the skies.”

The Provincial Press, throughout England, as well as that of Scotland, has been unanimous in their praise of the “History of the Blind,” as will be seen from the following extracts:—

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

“To appear as a labourer in the garden of literature under his disadvantages, and in an age when literature is advancing with such rapid strides, must seem a bold proceeding—yet this boldness deserves encouragement, and this encouragement we are sure will be awarded in the present instance; for it will be as delightful an occupation to read the very interesting book before us, as it has been to the author to render it worthy of public esteem: and if its readers could imbibe from its perusal, some of that spirit of love and goodwill to all mankind which breathes through the whole work, we are sure they will arise from this volume informed in mind, and improved in feeling.”—*Doncaster Gazette*.

“As a work of literary merit, it needs no commendation; it exhibits correct sentiments, just views of the subjects which fall in the author’s way, and has, as might be expected, a romantic interest about it to the reader—abounding in the most curious, instructive, and delightful incident. No one, we will venture to say,

can open the unassuming Memoir of its author, with which the volume is prefaced, without being interested in the man, and having every better sympathy of his nature enlisted on behalf of the patient suffering and intrepid enterprize of that interesting class of our fellow-beings.”—*Aberdeen Journal*.

“Here we have a Blind Biographer of the Blind,—one who both records and exemplifies the mental acquisitions which may be made by men entirely deprived of the most important sense through which knowledge is usually gained. Led by a natural sympathy, he has searched the annals of past times, for the most illustrious examples of blind men, who have attained eminence in any line by their talents. The volume is full of interesting facts, as may well be imagined. No person can read it without receiving much pleasure and instruction. The author is a man of worth, as well as of talent; and though not favoured by fortune, he seems to be happy in the possession of cheerful piety, and intellectual resources.”—*Leeds Mercury*.

“He not only earned his livelihood by his industry, but obtained a very extensive acquaintance with literature. A few years ago he compiled this work, of which the fourth edition is now before us. In the biography which he gives of himself and others, his piety, humility, sound sense, extensive information, and good taste,

are everywhere manifest. A more interesting book we have seldom read, and we most heartily recommend it, and the author to the kind attention of our readers.”—*Sheffield Independent*.

“From this period, his life presents a succession of struggles to obtain knowledge and a virtuous independence ; and, although he is more sparing in his details of the mental process by which his education was carried on, and of his ideas and feelings in relation to the external world, than we could wish, the description is interesting, and considering his peculiar condition, valuable. The manner in which the whole of the work is executed is highly creditable ; and regarded as the production of a blind and self-educated man, wonderful. We would especially recommend the lives of Blacklock and Huber as examples of the author’s powers.”—*Montrose Review*.

“This work exhibits a vast deal of careful and anxious research into the biographical history of these talented, but unfortunate men. The author has gleaned his information from the best authorities ; and by judiciously condensing and arranging his materials, has produced a work at once attractive for its novelty, and the amount of interesting information it conveys regarding the distinguished individuals whose history it records.”—*Scotsman*.

“It has been the object of the author to give the lives of these individuals and their distinguishing characteristics in one neat and portable volume : and the manner in which he has accomplished this task, especially when we consider that he has himself been blind from his infancy, reflects great credit on his talents, zeal, and perseverance. Having ourselves the pleasure of his acquaintance, we can undertake to say that he is a most modest, deserving, and unassuming character.”—*Liverpool Mercury*.

“His, however, has neither been an idle or a useless life. He has copied the ant for the industry with which he has collected and stored materials for the improvement and delight of his own mind ; and, although labouring under the discouraging defect of sight, he has succeeded in producing a volume of lives of eminent blind persons, which will be found worthy of the perusal of any individual, whatever may be his acquisitions.”—*Glasgow Courier*.

“Here is a curious book ! A History of the Blind, written by a blind man ! And a very respectable book it is, even were it the production of a man with all his faculties entire ; but considered as the work of one who from childhood has been blind, it cannot but be looked upon with wonder and admiration, and excite the deepest interest wherever it is known. We have seen and

conversed with him : and have found him a shrewd, sensible, and modest man ; intelligent, full of information upon many subjects, and well versed in most topics of general conversation.”—*Carlisle Journal*.

“ *Wilson’s Biography of the Blind*.—We are happy to add our testimony in addition to that of many of our contemporaries to the merits of this record of the talents, perseverance, and virtues of those who, like our author, have encountered the vicissitudes of life under the calamity of blindness. It is not only an interesting but instructive book, shewing the powers of the mind under one of the greatest discouragements, and the possible attainment of knowledge, notwithstanding that the access of wisdom is, at one entrance, quite shut out. In no one instance is this better exemplified than in the life of the author, an account of which prefaces his book, which, as a record of the pursuits of knowledge under difficulties, aggravated by blindness, has, we venture to say, scarcely a parallel.”—*Ipswich Journal*.

THE LIFE
OF
JAMES WILSON.

I WAS born May 24th, 1779, in Richmond, State of Virginia, North America. My father, John Wilson, was a native of Scotland. His family was originally of Queen's-ferry, a small village in Fifeshire, about eleven miles from Edinburgh; he had an uncle who emigrated to America when a young man, as a mechanic, where, by honest industry and prudent economy, he soon amassed a considerable property. He wrote for my father, who was then about eighteen years of age, and promised to make him his heir in case he would come to America. My grandfather hesitated for some time, but at length consented, and preparations were accordingly

made for my father's departure, who sailed from Greenock, and arrived safe at Norfolk; from whence he was forwarded by a merchant of that place, and soon reached Richmond, where he was gladly received by his uncle. This man being in the decline of life, without a family, and bowed down by infirmities, now looked upon his nephew as the comfort of his life, and the support of his declining years, and therefore entrusted him with the entire management of his affairs, which he had the happiness of conducting to the old man's satisfaction. Thus he continued to act till the death of his uncle in 1775, when he found himself in possession of £3000 value, in money and landed property.

Prior to this event, my father, on a visit to Baltimore, got acquainted with my mother, Elizabeth Johnson. To her he was introduced by an intimate friend, a Mr. Freeman, whom I may have occasion to mention hereafter. His uncle, on hearing this, could not bear the idea of a matrimonial connexion during his life, and so stood as a grand barrier to the completion of his wishes; but at the decease of the old man, being left to think and act for himself, as soon as his affairs were settled, he hastened to Balti-

more, where the long-wished-for union took place.

Shortly after his marriage he returned again to Virginia. His whole mind was now bent to the improvement of his plantation, and the acquiring of a paternal inheritance for his offspring. Flushed with the hope of spending the eve of life on a fertile estate that amply rewarded the hand of industry, of spending it in the bosom of his family, and of tasting the pleasures which domestic retirement affords, he followed his avocation with alacrity, and could say in the midst of his enjoyments,—

“The Winter’s night and Summer’s day,
Glide imperceptibly away.”

But, alas, how uncertain are human prospects and worldly possessions! How often do they wither in the bud; or bloom like the rose, to be blasted when full blown! How repeatedly do they sicken, even in enjoyment, and what appears at a distance like a beautiful verdant hill, degenerates on a closer survey into a rugged barren rock!—This moment the sky is bright, the air is serene, and the sun of our prosperity beams forth in unclouded splendour; and in the next blackness and darkness envelope us around, the

cloud of adversity bursts upon our devoted heads, and we are overwhelmed by the storm. It was so with my father, and, of course, the misfortune was entailed on me.

The disturbance which took place at Boston was at first considered only a riot ; but it shortly began to assume a more formidable aspect. The insurgents were soon embodied throughout all the Colonies, and the insurrection became general. Between them and the loyal party, no neutrality was allowed, and every man was finally under the necessity of joining one side or the other. For some time, indeed, my father strove to avoid taking an active part, but he was soon convinced that this was totally impossible. Many of his early friends had embraced the cause of the Revolutionists, and were very anxious that he should join their party. To excite him to this, several advantageous offers were made to him, and when this expedient failed, threats were resorted to. Exercising the right which belongs to every man, in politics, as well as in religion, I mean the right of private judgment, he in conjunction with a number of his neighbours, enrolled himself in a corps of volunteers, for the joint purpose of defending private pro-

perty, and supporting the royal cause. The iron hand of war was now stretched out, and unrelenting cruelty had taken possession of the hearts of those persons towards each other, who were formerly united by the ties of neighbourly affection ; consequently a band of enraged incendiaries, about 150 in number, mostly black slaves belonging to the neighbouring planters, no doubt, excited by their masters, attacked my father's house in his absence, plundered it of every valuable article, and finally burned it to the ground. From this alarming catastrophe, my mother and a few domestics narrowly escaped with their lives, and were obliged to seek shelter in the neighbouring woods, where they were exposed to the inclemency of the weather during a severe winter night. It would indeed be painful to me to enter minutely into the sufferings of my parents at this eventful period. Suffice it to say, they were stript of their all, and were left destitute and forlorn.

Down to the period of which I am now speaking no political question had ever given rise to more controversy than the American war. It is not my business to enter into a discussion of the subject ; all that remains necessary for me

to say, is a word or two in relation to my father's political conduct. That man who would not rejoice in being able to speak well of a departed parent, is not entitled to the name of man, and cannot be characterised by the feelings common to our nature. It affords me, then, a degree of pleasure to reflect, that my father must have acted throughout from principle. On this point, I am perfectly satisfied when I consider him rejecting emolument, despising threats, volunteering in the royal cause, forsaking his own home, and thereby leaving his family and property exposed, braving every danger, serving during five campaigns, and continuing active in the cause he had espoused, as long as he could be useful to it.

Being attached to that part of the army under the immediate command of Lord Cornwallis, he was taken prisoner when that gallant General was compelled to surrender to a superior force. His health, during these disasters, was much impaired, and on being liberated, he now thought of returning to Europe, in hopes that the air of his native country would restore him to his wonted state of health and vigour.

My mother was now residing near New-York, in the house of a friend, and thither he directed his steps. There he abode for a year, and found his health so much improved, that he determined to lose no more time in America, and so prepared to re-cross the Atlantic—

“And anxious to review his native shore,

“Upon the roaring waves embarked once more.”

Bound for Liverpool, under the guidance of Capt. Smith, the vessel set sail, and my parents bid a final adieu to the shores of Columbia;—what his feelings were at this crisis, it would be difficult to describe. Separated from that country in which his best hopes centered—cut off from the enjoyment of his legal possessions, without a probability of ever regaining them—impaired in his constitution, and crossed in all his former prospects, we may view him mourning over his misfortunes, and devising plans for his future exertions. It is true, he might have consoled himself with the pleasing reflection, that he was now about to revisit his native land, to meet with his nearest relations and best friends, and to spend the remainder of his days in the place of his nativity, in peace and safety; but how vain and transient are the hopes of mortal man!

All his joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, anxious cares, and premature plans, were shortly to terminate with him, and I was to be left at four years of age, 'destitute of a father. They had scarcely lost sight of land when his disease returned with increased violence, and twelve days after the vessel left New-York, he expired. The reader will not consider my situation utterly deplorable, while he thinks that still I had a mother to take care of me, and to assist me in my childish years. True, I had a mother, and a mother who survived my father; but it was only for twenty minutes!—for she, being in the last state of pregnancy, the alarm occasioned by his death brought on premature labour, and terminated her existence. Thus, on a sudden, I lost both father and mother, saw them sewed up in the same hammock, and committed to a watery grave.

“ My mother, when I learned that thou wast dead,
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed ?
Hover'd thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,
Wretch, even then, life's journey just begun ?
Perhaps thou gav'st me, though unfelt, a kiss,
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss—
Ah, that maternal smile, it answers—YES.”

Here my misfortune did not end; I was seized by the small pox, and for want of a mother's

care, and proper medical aid, this most loathsome disease deprived me of my sight. After a long and dangerous voyage, it being a hurricane almost all the time, the Captain was obliged to put into Belfast harbour, as the ship had suffered much in her masts, rigging &c., and the crew were nearly exhausted. When we arrived there, I had not recovered from the effects of my late illness, the symptoms of which were at one period so violent, as to threaten instant dissolution; to make me the more comfortable, I was sent immediately to Belfast. The following circumstance is still fresh in my recollection: the vessel was four miles from the town, and one of the seamen, who had been my nurse from the time of my mother's death, and who, during the passage, rendered me all the assistance which his situation allowed, kept me on his knee in the boat, and this kind-hearted individual administered the only cordial he possessed, which was rum and water.

There was no time lost by Captain Smith in applying to the church-warden in my behalf, and, in order to prevent me from becoming a charge to the parish, he deposited in his hands a sum of money, sufficient to pay the expence

of supporting me for five years, and I was soon provided with a nurse.

The reader, by this time, will be curious to know how I came by the information contained in the preceding pages. I am indebted for these particulars, at least so far as they concern my family's misfortunes in America, to the kindness of Mr. Freeman, who came passenger in the same ship. With this worthy gentleman, my mother had remained during my father's absence, and as I have already observed, she was received as one of the family, and treated with all that humanity and attention which her forlorn situation required. Mr. Freeman had been the sincere friend of my father from a short time after he landed in America; their age and their pursuits were the same, and their habits, tastes, and dispositions were congenial. Under these circumstances, a friendship was commenced, which, through a long series of vicissitudes and misfortunes, remain unbroken—a friendship which only ended with my father's life. Although, at one time, party politics ran high, and although my father joined the royal standard, while Mr. Freeman was a zealous republican, such were the liberal sen-

timents of this gentleman, that he never entertained towards his friend the least hostile feeling; and when my father was injured in his property, and persecuted for his opinions, he was always sure to find an asylum under the roof of this good and worthy man. While the vessel in which I came to Ireland was under repair, he and his family resided at Palmer's Hotel, Belfast, where, in the hearing of Mrs. Palmer, he related the particulars of his early acquaintance with his deceased friend, and the subsequent misfortunes which befel him in America, till the time of the mournful catastrophe which I have already described; this he did in such a simple and affecting manner, as not only caused him to shed tears himself, but also produced the same emotion in those who heard him.—Some important papers belonging to my father were preserved by Mr. F., and given to the church-warden. They consisted of old letters, and a journal which my father had kept from the time of his departure from Scotland till he left America, in which every particular connected with his history, during that eventful period, was carefully noted; but Mr. Scott, the church-warden, without examination, pronounced them totally useless, and they were sent

home to my nurse in the trunk with my clothes. The poor old woman was unable, herself, to ascertain their contents, nor did she ever think of shewing them to any intelligent person who could turn them to my advantage; she considered them mere waste paper, and used to light her pipe with them, and roll her flax while spinning. A little play-fellow of mine, who sought my company after school hours, for the purpose of getting me to tell stories to him, (for I was at that time famed over the neighbourhood for my legendary tales) would occasionally read to me such scraps of my father's letters and journal, as he found scattered about the room. From this circumstance, I still remember the names of Generals Howe, Clinton, and Robinson, which occasionally occurred, and with whom my father had corresponded, during the course of his military services in America.—Much blame has been attached to Mr. Robert Scott, for not having had my case more narrowly enquired into, while Captain Smith and Mr. Freeman were in Belfast. From the testimony of two such respectable individuals, and the information the above documents would probably have afforded, my claims might have been substantiated, and a compensation ob-

tained for me in lieu of my father's services, and the losses he sustained during the revolutionary war. But Mr. Scott, being a man of the world, thought he had fulfilled his duty when he had provided me with a nurse, and seen me comfortably lodged. Some years after, on being spoken to respecting his conduct in this affair, he replied "that he had enough business of his own to attend to, without giving himself unnecessary trouble." Thus was I neglected, at a time when something might have been done for me, by those whose duty it was to take care of me; but I was an infant, an orphan, and a stranger, and there was no one to step forward on my behalf. Mr. Freeman, to whom I owe so much, and whose memory I shall always cherish with the most grateful recollection, was so ill, during his stay in Belfast, that he was confined to his room. As soon as the vessel was refitted, he proceeded with his family to England, promising Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, on his departure, to write concerning me, and to take me back with him to America, having only come for the benefit of his health, and being about to return as soon as a change should take place for the better. His intention, he said, was to place me under a proper master, and have me taught mu-

sic ; but I never heard from him after, and from the state of his health, when he parted with me, I conclude that he has long been dead.

The ship being now completely repaired, the benevolent Captain and kind-hearted crew left me in Belfast a total stranger. No one knew me, or had ever heard anything of my family. My situation at this time was truly pitiable, as I was deprived of my parents at the time I most required their care ; still, however, I was under the protection of a merciful Providence, “ who can temper the wind to the shorn lamb.” In His word He has promised to be a Father to the fatherless, and to me this gracious saying has certainly been fulfilled. Many of the first families in the kingdom I can rank among my kindest friends ; and to nothing can I attribute this, but to the influence of His providence, who inclines the hearts of men to that which is pleasing in His sight.

My nurse was a good-natured old woman, and the anxiety which she shewed for my recovery, was much greater than could have been expected from a stranger ; night after night she sat by me, attended to my calls and administered to my wants, with all that maternal ten-

derness which a fond mother manifests to the child of her bosom. The prayers which she offered up in my behalf, and the tears of sympathy which stole down her aged cheek, bespoke a heart that could feel for the miseries of a fellow-creature. Contrary to all expectation, I recovered, and in the course of a few months I was able to grope my way through the house alone. Shortly after this, my right eye was couched by the late Surgeon Wilson, and in consequence of this operation, I could soon discern surrounding objects and their various colours. This was certainly a great mercy, for, though the enjoyment did not continue long, yet the recollection of it affords me pleasure even to the present day.

One day, when about seven years of age, as I crossed the street, I was attacked and dreadfully mangled by an ill-natured cow. This accident nearly cost me my life, and deprived me of that sight which was, in a great degree restored, but which I have never since enjoyed: thus it was the will of Providence to baffle the efforts of human skill, and to doom me to perpetual blindness; and it is this reflection that enables me to bear my misfortune without repining. And thank-

ful do I feel for my preservation through the many trying scenes of difficulty and peril to which I have been exposed ever since the days of my childhood. May I never forget the goodness of that beneficent Being to whom I owe so much; whose tender mercies are over all his works; and to whom, for favours and blessings, past and present, I would ascribe the homage of a humble and grateful heart.

“Fond memory here revives
“Each dream-like image of the days gone by;
“What time on other shores, * * * *
“I chased the scaly brood, or mid the throng
“Of giddy school-boys, sported in the waves,
“Or with young triumph saw the tiny ship,
“Fair miniature of such as bear afar
“The thunder of Britannia, in the race
“Shoot past her rivals.”

When I was about eight or nine years of age, I was not only projector, but workman, for all the children in the neighbourhood. I amused myself occasionally in constructing little windmills, cars, and ships. A kind friend made me a present of a little ship, a perfect model of the Royal George, which was lost at Spithead, and this toy was esteemed by me as one of the most precious gifts I could possibly receive. Having made myself perfectly acquainted with

its structure, I thought of making one for myself, upon the same principle. I procured a piece of wood, and with no other tools than an old knife, a chisel, and a hammer, completed, (not, however, without the loss of some blood,) my first attempt at ship-building. This pleased my juvenile companions so well, that I had every day numerous applications for ships. They procured me the wood, and my ambition was not a little augmented, when I found that I was applied to by boys considerably my seniors, and possessing many advantages of which I never had to boast; before I resigned this trade, I completed my fourteenth ship. There was in the neighbourhood a piece of water, about one hundred feet in circumference, appropriated to the accommodation of some flocks of ducks and geese. In the evening we were accustomed to dispossess these hereditary occupiers of their native element, and form our fleet into two divisions; the English were distinguished by red and blue streamers—the French, by white. Two boys, with their breeches rolled up to their knees, were generally employed to direct the movements of each squadron, he on the right being distinguished by the name of Admiral, and the boy on the left by that of Commodore.

The plan of attack was, that each ship should be so far from her companions, as to preserve the regular sailing distance, and at the commencement of the action, the English vessels were so placed as always to have the weather-gage of the enemy. Each English ship formed a triangle with her two French opponents, and so, when the wind blew, she passed between them, and this was called breaking the line. It was the duty of the Admiral and Commodore of each fleet, at this alarming juncture, to restore order, and form the lines anew. The English were drawn up in the same position which they occupied at the commencement of the action; the French were placed about two feet in advance, with their sterns towards the English, and the wind filling the sails of both equally, caused the French to fly and the English to pursue. At this moment the shout of triumph was raised, and the joyful cry of victory! victory! burst forth from the infant multitude who were witnesses of our naval exploit.

“ Loud shouts of triumph from the victors rise,
“ Roll’d o’er the main, and echo to the skies.”

I have been somewhat particular in my de-

tails of these Lilliputian engagements, hoping that it may prove useful, in case this little book should chance to fall into the hands of any benevolent person, who might read it to some blind boy, to whom it might serve as a stimulus to spur him on to similar amusements. It could not fail to produce, to such a boy, a two-fold advantage, as the exercise would be conducive to his health, (which he could not expect to enjoy sitting in the chimney-corner, brooding over his misfortunes,) and it would effectually destroy that timidity and melancholy which are generally the fruits of a sedentary life, and would inspire him with a confidence and courage, which he could not expect to attain in an inactive state.

A few years after this event, my foster-mother died, and again I was left forlorn and without a friend. In this precarious state, the only means I had of obtaining subsistence were apparently ill-suited to my situation. The reader may, perhaps, smile when I inform him, that at this time I was considered by many as a man of letters, and that I earned my bread in consequence of my practical engagements in relation to them. This, indeed, was the case; for

I was employed to carry letters to and from the offices of the different merchants in the town and neighbourhood. My punctuality and despatch in this respect were much in my favour, so that I was generally employed in preference to those who enjoyed the use of all their senses. In the course of time my sphere was enlarged, and often, on important business, I have borne despatches to the distance of thirty or forty miles. This was certainly not a little extraordinary, in a place where the confusion and bustle of business subjected me to so many dangers.

Being advised to attempt the study of music, I made an almost hopeless effort, as I had no person to instruct me; but, although I could only scrape a few tunes which I had learned by ear, this did not prevent me from being called on occasionally to officiate at dances. For no matter how despicable the musician, or insignificant his instrument, the sound operates like an invisible charm—elevates the passions of the lower orders—makes them shake their grief and their cares off at their heels, and, moving “on the light fantastic toe,” causes them to forget the bitterness of the past and


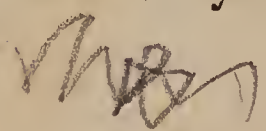
prevents them from brooding over the prospect of future evils.

“ And happy, though my harsh touch, falt’ring still,
“ But mock’d all time and marr’d the dancer’s skill ;
“ Yet would the village praise my wond’rous power,
“ And dance, forgetful of the noon-tide hour.”

I soon found, in consequence of this avocation, that I was exposed to numerous vices. I was obliged to associate with the dregs of society, to witness many scenes of folly and great wickedness, and to stay out late at nights, and thus expose myself to dangers of different kinds. As my feelings were continually at variance with this occupation, which I adopted more from necessity than from choice, I soon gave it up, and composed a farewell address to my fiddle.

The family in which I lived was both poor and illiterate, and hence I was a considerable time before I acquired any taste for knowledge. They were generous and humane to all who required their help, and were also strictly honest in their dealings, and would not defraud on any account whatever. I am happy to have it in my power to notice these traits of character, which certainly reflect credit on their

memories; yet, praiseworthy as these may appear, they were deficient in their duty to me, so far as the improvement of my mind was concerned. It was painful, indeed, in my youth, to behold both in towns and villages, the ignorance and wickedness which prevailed among children of both sexes—swearing, lying, and throwing stones; and the feelings of the passengers, while walking along, were not only pained by their profane language, but their personal safety was also in danger, from the stones which were carelessly and mischievously flung around. But, thanks be to God, this evil is at length disappearing; the remedy applied has been successful, and that remedy is the Sunday School. In the districts where these institutions are established, the children, both in their appearance and manners, have undergone a great change for the better. Instead of injuring their neighbours, and breaking the Lord's Day, they are now taught to read the Scriptures, which, under the Divine blessing, qualifies them to fill the various situations in society. They are here taught that stealing is sinful, and that lying, swearing, and bearing false witness, subject them to the wrath of Heaven. They are also taught to honour their



parents, that they may obtain the blessing which God has promised unto the children of obedience, “and that their days may be long in the land, which the Lord their God giveth them;” and they are likewise strictly enjoined to observe the Sabbath-day. These doctrines may be lightly looked upon by some, but it is in a breach of these laws, and a disregard of these truths, that all the crimes originate, which disgrace the character of man, and degrade him below the beasts of the field.

I present these circumstances to my reader, that he may know the kind of society in which I mingled during the first fifteen years of my life. It cannot be imagined that much information could be derived from such a source as this.

About this time I began to pay some attention to books; but my first course of reading was, indeed, of very indifferent description, as I was obliged to listen to what was most convenient. However, I made the best of what I heard, and in a short time, in conjunction with a boy of my own age who read to me, I was master of the principal circumstances in Jack the Giant

Killer, Valentine and Orson, Robinson Crusoe, and Gulliver's Travels. The subject of these formed my taste, was swallowed with avidity, and inspired me with a degree of enthusiasm which awakes even at the present day, on hearing a new and interesting work read. These, however, were soon laid aside for novels and romances, several hundred volumes of which I procured and got read in the course of three years; and, although there are few passages out of all I heard then which I think worth a place in my recollection now, yet, at that time I was well acquainted with the most interesting characters and events contained in these works. My present dislike to this kind of reading I do not entertain without reason; for, first, a great deal of precious time is thereby lost that might be more usefully employed; secondly, the judgment is left without exercise, while the passions are inflamed; and thirdly, those who are much in the habit of novel reading, seldom have a taste for books of any other kind, and hence their judgments of men and things must differ as far from his who has seen the world, as most novels differ from real life. I am well aware that some of them are well written, and display ability in the author, have the circumstances well disposed, the characters ably

delineated, and the interest preserved till the final close of the last scene, which generally proves impressive and affecting. But to what does all this tend? (Except in recording the customs and manners of the times which they represent,) only to mislead the imagination, to foster a morbid sensibility to fictitious woe, and a romantic admiration of ideal and unattainable perfection, without strengthening the judgment, cultivating active benevolence, or a just appreciation of real worth. In contrasting the characters of Tom Jones and Sir Charles Grandison, with those of the Duke of Sully and Lord Clarendon, we observe a striking difference between the real and fictitious personages; yet, the mere novel reader is neither improved nor amused in reading the lives of these illustrious characters, while the tear of sympathy steals down his cheek, as he pores over the imaginary sufferings of the heroes and heroines of romance. There are, I know, many novels to which the above observations do not apply, particularly some of modern date, which are very superior to those above mentioned; but still the best, even of these, present overcharged pictures of real life, and, in proportion as they are fascinating, they indispose the mind to more serious reading.

I now engaged with Mr. Gordon, Editor of the Belfast News-Letter, to deliver the papers to subscribers on the days of publication. Half a dozen papers, and two shillings per week, were my wages in this service. The papers I lent to tradesmen at a halfpenny an hour, and when the time allotted to the first set of customers was expired, it afforded me an agreeable exercise to collect and distribute them to others. While in this employment, I had sometimes to go four or five miles into the country ; but, having an accurate knowledge of the surrounding neighbourhood, and being well acquainted with every gentleman's seat in the vicinity of Belfast, however remotely situated from the public road, I was able to execute my business with exactness and despatch.

I hope the account of the following adventure will be acceptable to my readers, as it will illustrate what I have said, respecting my perambulations through the town and neighbourhood where I was reared.

On a winter's evening, in 1797, as I stood in one of the principal streets, I was accosted by a person, who, in the southern accent, enquired

its name. After I had imparted the desired information, he told me that he was a soldier, and belonged to a detachment of the Limerick Militia, which had marched into Belfast that day. "I went out," said he, "to look for the sergeant, to get the pay, and being a stranger in the town, I lost myself; I left my wife and my firelock in the lodging house, and I forgot the name both of the street and of the people that own the house. I have been wandering about these two or three hours, and nobody can tell me where they are." I enquired, if he had observed any particular building near the place where he left his wife. "I believe," replied he, "after turning one or two corners, I observed a church." I considered for a moment, in which of the streets in that quarter there was a lodging house, and recollected that a Mrs. Tawny kept a house of entertainment in William-street. I bade him follow me, and took good care to keep before him, that he should not discover that I was blind. At that time there were no houses on the S.W. side of William-street; and fronting the houses on the N. E., there was a deep ditch, which served as a receptacle for all the nuisances of the neighbourhood. As the night was very dark, and there were no lamps in that

direction, his eyes were of no service to him whatever; consequently he resigned himself entirely to my guidance. We had to cross the puddle already mentioned, by six stepping stones; and though there was no danger whatever of being drowned, it was more than probable that, had the soldier got a dip, his plight, on coming out, would have been far different from that in which he appeared at parade. I groped with my staff for the first stepping stone, and getting on it, I took hold of his hand, and bade him put his foot where mine was, warning him at the same time, of the consequence of not balancing well. In this manner I conducted him from one stone to another, till I landed him safely on the opposite side, and was highly diverted to hear him observe, that my eyes were better than his. I brought him to Mrs. Tawny's, and left him standing at the door, while I went in to make the necessary enquiry. I soon learned that I had guessed right, for I found his wife almost in despair at his absence, but I bade her be of good cheer, for I had brought her husband to her; and so saying, I called him in. His wife was rejoiced to see him again, and saluted him, by crying out, "Bless me, dear Barney, where have you been? I thought you

were lost!"—"Arrah, my dear, I couldn't find my way back," said he, "if it hadn't been for this decent man, that shewed me the house." "And more shame for you," said the landlady, "for you have your eye-sight, and yet you must be guided to your lodging by a blind man." On hearing this, they were both astonished, and began heartily to bless themselves. As their astonishment, however, subsided, the hospitality of their Irish hearts began to display itself; for, on discovering that I was only a mortal being, and partook of the same nature and appetite as themselves, I was cordially pressed to stay and partake of the fare, that Barney, in all his peregrinations through the streets, had taken good care to bring safely to his wife, I, however, declined the kind offer, and left them to drink their tea themselves, and enjoy the happiness that succeeds, when groundless fears and trivial disappointments have vanished away.

At this time the French Revolution gave a sudden turn to the posture of affairs in Europe, and every mail which arrived brought an account of some important change in the political state of that unhappy country. All the powers on the Continent now armed against France,

and she, on her part, received them with a firmness which reflected honour upon her arms. The public mind at this period was agitated, and the wisest politicians of the day were filled with alarm, and dreaded the consequences which were likely to result, from a revolution that threatened every government in Europe with a total overthrow. For my part, I had little to lose as an individual, and the only concern I felt was for the safety of my country; politics therefore became my favourite study, and I soon got acquainted with the passing news of the day.

A late writer, in speaking of memory, calls it "the storehouse of the mind;" but it has often been compared to a well-constructed arch, on which the more weight is laid, the stronger it becomes. This I found to be the case with mine, for the more I committed to it, the more I found it was capable of receiving and retaining. In what manner ideas of extrinsic objects, and notions of certain relations, can be preserved in the mind, it is impossible to determine; but we are sure that the thing is so, though the manner be unknown to us. As ideas and recollections are merely immaterial things, which can

in no wise partake of the known properties of matter, so, the receptacle in which they are lodged, must be of a similar nature. That matter and spirit are united, we have no reason to doubt; for the pleasures of memory, in the moment of reflection, are evidently operative on the body, inasmuch as its motions and gestures are expressive of the inward feelings of the mind. As the memory, therefore, is more or less capacious, as the store of ideas laid up there is greater or less, and as they are pleasing or unpleasing in themselves, so the impressions derived from memory, are either powerful or weak, either pleasing or painful. As my taste always inclined to literature, and the knowledge of things valuable in themselves, the remembrance of them is, consequently, a never failing source of amusement to me, whether I be found “in the void waste, or in the city full.”

“ Oh, Memory ! how pure, how exquisite are thy pleasures !
“ To thee, and to thy sister Hope, the bright handmaids who
“ support us through the rude path of existence, how deeply
“ are all men indebted ! ”

It was now, indeed, that I was able to appreciate the pleasures of memory in a superior degree, for I knew the names, stations, and Admirals, of almost all the ships in the navy, and was also acquainted with the number, facing,

and name of every regiment in the army, according to the respective towns, cities, or shires from which they were raised. I served, of course, as an Army and Navy List for the poor in the neighbourhood, who had relations in either of these departments, and was capable of informing them of all the general news.

The following anecdote shews the powers of my memory at that period. Being invited by a friend to spend an evening at his house, I had scarcely sat down when three gentlemen entered; and the conversation turning on the news of the day, I was requested by my friend to repeat the names of as many of the ships of the British navy as I could recollect, telling me at the same time that he had a particular reason for making the request. I commenced, and my friend marked them down as I went along, until I had repeated six hundred and twenty, when he stopped me, saying I had gone far enough. The cause of the request was then explained. One of the gentlemen had wagered a supper that I could not mention five hundred; he, however, expressed himself much pleased at his loss, having been, as he acknowledged, highly entertained by the experiment.

Although, at this time, I had little relish for any other kind of reading but newspapers and novels, yet I was not wholly insensible to the charms of poetry. I amused myself with making verses at intervals, but I could never produce any thing in that way which pleased myself. My acquaintances, particularly the young people, gave me sufficient employment in composing epigrams, love songs, epistles and acrostics, in praise of their sweet-hearts. Many of those juvenile productions are still extant, and, though miserable in themselves, continue to find admirers among those classes for whom they were composed.

“ The lovely maniac fled the haunts of men,—

“ Traced the sea-beach, or sought the lonely glen.”

The first of my productions which met the public eye, was “ An elegy on the death of an unfortunate Female.” This poor maniac was known for more than twenty years in the neighbourhood of Belfast, by the appellation of Mad Mary, and was at last found dead in the ruins of an old house, where she had taken refuge during a stormy winter night. This little piece being much noticed, on account of the subject

having excited a general interest, I was advised to collect my best productions, and give them to the public. Encouraged by the patronage of a few generous individuals, I set about the work, which in few months made its appearance.

I will now, for the amusement of my readers, insert a few extracts from this little collection.

Ah ! you, who sport in pleasure's morn,
Who ne'er have felt a pain,
Who never trod on trouble's thorn,
Or heard affliction's plain ;

And you, whom Heaven has doubly blest
With light—Oh, gift divine !
And whom misfortunes never press'd
With misery's sons to join :

Ah ! did you know what others feel,
Beneath the shafts of woe,
You'd kindly blunt the pointed steel
That's aim'd from sorrow's bow.

AN ADDRESS TO THE SUN.

Oh ! glorious orb ! thy genial rays
Promote and renovate my lays ;
Though HE, who gave thee all thy charms,
Has folded me in darkness' arms.

But on that day when thou shalt shine
No more, in native beams divine ;
When Erin's self, my muse's pride,
Shall be o'erwhelmed in ruin's tide ;
And mankind summon'd from the tomb
To hear their everlasting doom ;
The veil that now enshrouds my eyes
From viewing THEE and ambient skies,
Shall be withdrawn, while 'fulgent day
Shall o'er my eye-balls lambent play.

TO MEMORY.

COME MEMORY, and paint those scenes
I knew when I was young,
When meadows bloomed, and vernal greens,
By Nature's band were sung.

I mean those hours which I have known,
Ere light from me withdrew—
When blossoms seemed just newly blown,
And wet with sparkling dew.

Yet, ah ! forbear, kind Memory cease
The picture thus to scan !
Let all my feelings rest in peace,
'Tis prudence' better plan ;

For why should I on other days,
With such reflections turn,
Since I'm deprived of vision's rays,
Which sadly makes me mourn ?

And when I backward turn my mind,
I feel of sorrow's pain,
And weep for joys I left behind,
On childhood's flowery plain ;

Yet now, through intellectual eyes,
Upon a happier shore,
And circled with eternal skies,
Youth sweetly smiles once more.

Futurity displays the scene,
Religion lends her aid,
And decks with flowers for ever green,
And blooms that ne'er can fade.

Oh, happy time ! when will it come,
Then I shall quit this sphere,
And find an everlasting home,
With peace and friendship there ?

Throughout this chequer'd life 'tis mine
To feel affliction's rod ;
But soon I'll overstep the line
That keeps me from my God.

A DREAM.

Night o'er the sky her sable mantle spread,
And all around was hushed in sweet repose,
Nor silence suffered from intrusive noise ;—
Save now and then, the owl's displeasing scream,

From yon old pile of ancient grandeur sent,
Broke in, obtrusive on the tranquil hours;
Reflection took my mind, and o'er my thoughts
Unnumbered visions flit with rapid speed;
I thought on man, and all his childish joys,
From rosy infancy to palsied age—
And oft the sigh of recollection stole,
Then heaved my breast with sorrow's poignant throb;
For ah! I feel what some have never felt,
That is, to be in one continued night,
From January's sun, till dark December's eve;
And strange it is, when sleep commands to rest,
While gloomy darkness spreads her lurid veil,
That then by being blind, I suffer most!
O sight! what art thou? were my final words,
When sleep with leaden fingers sealed my eyes—
Now free from care, and tumult's torturing din,
Young fancy led me from my humble cot;
And far from space, where suns unnumbered burn,
I with her took a grand excursive flight,
Then back again to Erin's hills of green,
I with her wandered; nor did night, nor gloom,
One step intrude to shade the prospects round.
I saw sweet Scarvagh, in her loveliest garb,
And all her trees in summer's dress were clad;
Her honoured mansion, seat of peace and love,
Gave rapture to my breast, for there I've found
True hospitality, which once did grace
The halls of Erin's chiefs of old;
But soon, alas! the hum of nightly bands,
And vagrants, strolling on in quest of sin,
Bore fancy from me with her golden train,
And once more left me in the folds of night.

VERSES

ON THE

RICHMOND NATIONAL INSTITUTION FOR THE BLIND,
IN IRELAND.

You from whose eyes the tender tear,
Can gently drop for human woe,
Oh ! pour your soft compassion here,
And here your generous boon bestow.

O think what joys to you are giv'n,
Which they must never hope to share.
To view the bright expanse of heav'n,
While sweet emotion speaks in prayer.

For them the morning's rosy light,
In vain the glowing east o'erspreads ;
To them the empress of the night
In vain her silvery lustre sheds.

The blossoms of the scented spring
In vain their silken leaves unfold ;
And o'er each mead profusely fling
Their varied tints of living gold.

In vain the twilight shade descends
In magic softness, pure, serene ;
In vain the star of evening blends
Its dewy light to gild the scene.

Let infidels, presumptuous ask
 With reason's boasted pride elate,
But be the Christian's sacred task,
 To cheer his brother's hapless fate.

Be yours, with liberal hand, to prove
 The feelings of a grateful mind,
Be yours, by acts of pious love,
 To soothe the sorrows of the blind.

Be his, to speak the Saviour's name,
 To hearts that catch the joyful sound,
To kindle pure devotion's flame,
 And shed immortal glory round.

Thus, when the veil of darkness spread,
 In all the gloom of endless night,—
“Let there be light,” Jehovah said,
 Creation heard, and all was light.

On the above passages the reader is left to comment as he thinks proper. Composed by one destitute of sight, of learning, and even of an intelligent friend who could correct my compositions, they must, of course, stand very low in the scale of merit. Still, however, they were of service to me, and I found the public rather disposed to pity, than to censure, an humble individual so far beneath the notice of the critic.

Lord Cornwallis, who succeeded Earl Camden in the vice-royalty of Ireland, in making the tour of that kingdom in 1799, arrived at Belfast. This appearing a favourable opportunity, I was determined to petition his Excellency in relation to the losses of my family in America. A petition was accordingly drawn up, stating my father's possessions in that country, his services in the army, and his death on his passage returning to Europe, as already related. This petition I put into the hands of the late George Joy, Esq. who kindly offered to present it, bidding me to call on him the next day; I did so, but to my utter disappointment, I found that Mr. Joy, on dressing for dinner, the preceding evening, had unfortunately forgotten my petition, in the pocket of his coat which he had worn in the morning. Disappointed in this quarter, I resolved on following his lordship to Annadale, the seat of the late Honourable Chichester Skeffington, as he had left Belfast for that place at seven o'clock in the morning. I did so, and again I was fated to feel the bitter pang of disappointment; for, on arriving at Annadale, I was informed, that his Excellency had, a few hours before, left that for Dublin. Thus terminated the only hope I ever had of obtaining an inde-

pendence ; but, as there was no use in repining, I endeavoured to submit to the disappointment with resignation.

At this time I turned my attention to a new occupation, and fixed on that of an itinerant dealer ; for this purpose I borrowed a few pounds from a friend, with which I purchased a stock of such hardware articles as might suit the country people.

“ Being at the bottom of fortune’s wheel, every new revolution might raise me, but could not possibly depress me lower ; ” and hence I commenced my peregrinations in the country. While employed in this way, I had an opportunity of meeting with a variety of characters, and of mingling in different societies. It is but justice here to remark, that among the peasantry of Ulster, I have met with many individuals, whose good nature, benevolent dispositions, and kind hospitality, were not only an honour to their country, but even to human nature.

While vending my hardware through the country, I found this occupation ill-suited to my circumstances ; I was exposed to many in-

conveniences, and experienced much fatigue and distress, both of body and mind. The want of sight made it difficult for me to steer my course aright, and I was often exposed both to hardships and danger. Many a time have I heard the thunder roll over my head, and felt the teeming rain drench me from head to foot, while I have unknowingly passed by a place of shelter, or stood like a statue, not knowing which way to turn, though within a few paces of a house. Still, however, while reflecting on all these circumstances, and on the sympathy which I was sure to meet with after my sufferings, I have been often led to conclude that the balance was in my favour, when compared with many who enjoyed the use of every sense ; there is no rose without its thorn, neither is there any state without its comforts. While travelling, I was in little danger from horses and carriages in motion, as the noise warned me of their approach ; hence, if I was injured, it was generally from something at rest. It may be imagined, however, that I was not much exposed to harm in the day-time, nor will it be supposed, that any person could be so cruel as intentionally to injure a blind man ; yet I have suffered repeatedly from the intem-

perance of some, and the brutality of others ; and, had I entrusted entirely to the good nature of the multitude, I might have been ridden down oftener than the mind would be willing to suppose.

In the early part of my life, I prided myself much on my activity as a pedestrian. I have frequently travelled through a part of the country with which I was totally unacquainted, at the rate of thirty miles in a day ; but this was only in cases of emergency, for my usual rate was fifteen to twenty miles per day ; this, however, is too much for a person of my situation, for supposing a blind man sets out to travel alone on foot, to a distance of twenty miles, he will experience much more fatigue, and go over more ground than one will do who has his sight, in a journey of twice that length. This is evident, from the zig-zag manner in which he traverses the road, and as Hammond says, in his description of the drunken man, staggering home, “from the serpentine manner in which he goes, he makes as much of a mile as possible.” In the summer time, the blind man is subject to shock his whole frame, by trampling in the cart ruts that are dried upon the road,

and in the winter, he travels through thick and thin; it is impossible for him to choose his steps, and at that season of the year the water is collected into puddles, which he cannot avoid; and, hence, in walking to a distance, he is sure to wet both his feet and legs, which is not only disagreeable, but frequently injurious to the health. At one time he bruises his foot against a stone; at another time he sprains his ankle; and frequently, when stepping out quickly, his foot comes in contact with something unexpectedly, by which he is thrown on his face. Thus, in travelling on foot, he labours under various disadvantages, unknown to those who are blest with the sense of sight.

The above accidents, however, are not the only misfortunes connected with the state of the blind; in walking alone, he often wanders out of his direct way, sometimes into fields, and sometimes into bye-paths, so that the greater part of the day may be spent before he can rectify his mistake. Often have I been in this predicament myself, and frequently have I sat a considerable part of the day, listening by the way-side for a passing foot, or the joyful sound of the human

voice ; and sometimes I have been obliged, in the evening, to retrace the ground I had gone over in the morning, and thus endured much fatigue of body and mind before I could regain the road from which I wandered. How different, then, is my situation from his who has his sight : from the impediments which cause me so much pain, he is happily exempt ; while he pursues his journey he can trace the various beauties of the surrounding scenery ; the picturesque landscape, the spreading oak, the flowing brook, the towering mountain that hides its blue summit in the clouds, the majestic ocean dashing on the “shelly shore,” and the vast expansive arch of heaven, bespangled with innumerable stars, have all, for him, their respective beauties, and fail not to awaken pleasing and agreeable reflections ; but to the blind, these pleasures are unknown, the charms of nature are concealed under an impenetrable veil, and the God of light has placed between him, and silent, but animated nature, an insuperable barrier.

“ While to the breezy upland led,
At noon, or blushing eve, or morn,
He hears the red-breast o’er his head,
While round him breathes the scented thorn ;

But oh ! instead of Nature's face,
Hills, dales, and woods, and streams combined ;
Instead of tints, and forms, and grace,
Night's blackest mantle shrouds the blind."

A blind person always inclines to the hand in which his staff is carried, and this often has a tendency to lead him astray, when he travels on a road with which he is unacquainted. But were there no danger arising from this, still, from his situation, he is liable to imminent dangers on his way, from which nothing can preserve him but an all-directing Providence ; and this I have frequently experienced.

In a cold winter evening, as I travelled to Lisburn, I happened to wander from the direct road into a lane, which led immediately to the canal. Unconscious of the danger to which I was exposed, I was stepping on pretty freely, when my attention was suddenly arrested by a cry of "Stop ! stop !" Of the first and second call I took no notice, as I judged some other person was addressed ; but at the third warning I stopped, when a woman came running up almost breathless, and asked me where I was

going; I replied, "To Lisburn." "No," said she, "you are going direct to the canal, and three or four steps more would have plunged you into it." My heart glowed with thankfulness to the all-wise Disposer of events, and to the woman who was made the instrument of my preservation. She said, she happened to come to the door to throw out some slops, when she saw me posting on; and thinking, from my manner of walking, that I was intoxicated, she became alarmed for my safety, as a person had been drowned in the very same place, not many days before.

About three miles from Strabane, at the little village of Clady, there is a bridge across the Finn. I had just passed along it on my way to Strabane, when a man enquired if I had been conducted over by any person; I replied in the negative. "It was a fortunate circumstance then, indeed," said he, "that you kept the left side, for the wall is broken down at the right side, just above the centre arch, and the river is there very rapid, and the bank on each side steep. Had you fallen in, you must have been inevitably lost."

The following instance of Providential preservation is still more singular than either of the preceding. From Ballymena, I was one day going out to the Rev. Robert Stewart's. At the end of the town, the road divides, one branch leads to Ballymena, and the other to Broughshane. In the Forks an old well was opened for the purpose of sinking a pump. It being two o'clock in the day, the workmen were all at dinner, and I was groping about with my staff to ascertain the turn of the road, when a man bawled out to me to stand still, and not move a single step. I did so ; when he came forward, he told me that two steps more would have hurried me into a well eighty feet deep, and half full of water. He held me by the arm, and made me put forth my staff to feel, and be convinced of my danger ; when I found that I was actually not more than one yard from the edge, the blood ran cold in my veins ; I was scarcely able to stand erect—

“ And every limb, unstrung, with terror shook.”

These are but a few of the numerous instances of hair-breadth escapes, which I have experienced in my peregrinations through life.

When in the slippery paths of youth,
With heedless steps I ran ;
Thine arm, unseen, conveyed me safe,
And led me up to man.

When, from this point, I survey the uphill road of life, over which I have passed, in the course of my pilgrimage ; when I think of the many dangers to which I have been exposed, both by land and water ; the very remembrance of those things, even at this distance of time, makes me shudder. These reflections bring before my mind, in all its force and beauty, that gracious promise, “I will bring the blind by a way that they know not ; I will lead them into paths that they have not known.” Only, “Be strong, and of a good courage ; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed : for the Lord thy God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest.” In the course of my life I have had many mercies to be grateful for ; good health has not been among the least of the blessings I have enjoyed. I am now between sixty and seventy years of age. During the whole of that period, I have never had recourse to medical advice. To add to this, I have always been blest with a cheerful and contented mind,

with an uncommon flow of spirits. I could laugh and joke with the most of people. Often, in returning, wet and weary, from one of those long journeys, which I was obliged to take in search of employment, when seated at my own fireside, surrounded by my family, the toils and fatigues I had undergone were all forgotten, and I enjoyed my frugal meal with a degree of pleasure, perhaps unknown to those who dine at the tables of kings and princes. How thankful ought I to be to the Giver of all Mercies, who has looked out, and provided for me, as he has done, and has, as it were, led me about by the hand, from the days of my infancy to the present hour, in health and safety ! And in the language of the Psalmist, I can truly say, “ Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life.” Reader ! whoever thou art, may you and I, and all who are near and dear to us, in this world, be enabled to realise the concluding sentence of the inspired writer, that is, “ May we dwell in the presence of the Lord for ever.” Amen.

In the year 1800, there was an institution established in Belfast, for the purpose of instructing those who were deprived of sight, in

such employments as were suited to their unfortunate situation; it was styled, "The Asylum for the Blind." As it is of vast importance to the well-being of society, that all who have not independent fortunes should be enabled to support themselves by their own industry, for which the blind are seldom qualified, owing to their unhappy state, and the want of a suitable education, this Asylum promised to be of the greatest utility. I was entered on the books of the Institution as an apprentice, and continued in it, until within a few months of its dissolution. When I left the Asylum, I proposed working on my own account, and having acquired a partial knowledge of the upholstery business, I was soon employed. My friends exerted themselves on this occasion to promote my interest, and though there were several individuals who had learned the business in the same Asylum, and who could work better than I, yet I generally had the preference. Many of my friends went so far as even to contrive work for me, for which they had not immediate use, merely to keep me employed. Although my pecuniary circumstances were not much improved, yet, I now experienced a greater share of happiness than I had ever

enjoyed before. I was in a situation that afforded me better opportunities of acquiring knowledge than I had ever possessed; previously to this time I also met with much friendship from many to whom I was but very little known; and when it was understood that I was desirous of information, I generally received assistance in this way, even where I could not have expected it; either the lady of the house in which I was employed, or one of the children, generally read to me while I was at work. Thus I improved my mind, while labouring for my support. Time glided pleasantly away, no room being left for idle speculations or gloomy forebodings.

In 1803, a number of young men formed a Reading Society in Belfast, and, although they were all mechanics, yet some of them were also men of taste, and possessed considerable talents. Into this society I was admitted a member, at the same time that I was kindly exempted from the expense attending its regulations. One of the members was a man of the most extraordinary character I had ever known; and, therefore, I attached myself to him. To good-nature, he united an original genius,

good taste, and great sensibility; and, had an early education been his lot, or had his mind been sufficiently expanded by study, he would have become an ornament to society; but he was totally devoid of ambition, and never had a wish to rise above the rank of an humble mechanic. This man proposed to read to me, if I would procure books: our stated time for this employment was from nine o'clock in the evening until one in the morning, in the winter season, and from seven until eleven in the summer; when I was not particularly engaged, I frequently attended him at other intervals. At breakfast he had half an hour allotted to him, at dinner a whole hour, and every minute of this was filled up, for he generally read to me between every cup of tea. By this means I committed to memory a vast collection of pieces, both in prose and verse, which I still retain, and which have been, until the present hour, a never-failing source of amusement to me. The more I heard read, the more my desire for knowledge increased, while I learned, at the same time, that "the more a man knows, he finds he knows the less."

So ardent and steady was my desire for

knowledge at that time, that I could never bear to be absent a single night from my friend; and often, when walking in the country, where I could have been comfortably accommodated, I have travelled three or four miles, in a severe winter night, to be at my post in time. Pinched with cold, and drenched with rain, I have many a time sat down and listened for several hours together, to the writings of Plutarch, Rollin, or Clarendon. For seven or eight years we continued this course of reading; but to give a catalogue of the authors we perused in that time, would be foreign to my present purpose: suffice it to say, that every book in the English language, which we could procure, was read with avidity. Ancient and Modern History, Poetry, Biography, Essays, Magazines, Voyages, Travels, &c. were among our studies.

How precious these opportunities were, and how dear the recollection of them are to me even now, can only be adequately understood by the few who have realized similar enjoyments, and can indulge in similar recollections.

Thus, and otherwise, I was enabled to collect

a number of miscellaneous facts in sundry departments of knowledge, but without being in the possession of the links necessary to bind them together, and form them into a connected system. But even as detached facts they were valuable; and when I obtained one fact that seemed new, striking, and important, I felt a thrill to my very soul, as if I had found a blessing: and so I had.

“ And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,
“ Still first to fly where sensual joys invade.
“ Unfit in these degenerate times of shame
“ To catch the heart, or strike for honest fame.”

Good poetry is one of the richest traits that a cultivated mind can possibly enjoy. To poetry I was devoted from my youth—not as an author, but an admirer. In the course of my acquaintance with this delightful art, I selected a large number of choice pieces, which I considered to contain the beauties of all the authors I had heard read. Those treasures I laid up in the storehouse of my memory: and they were to me, upon all occasions, a never-failing source of intellectual enjoyment.

At night, when in bed, I repeated poetry to myself, until I fell asleep. When travelling alone on the public road, I beguiled away many a tedious mile by poetry. When seated on the outside of a stage coach, while my fellow-travellers were admiring the beauties of the surrounding scenery, I was regaling my mind with some of these splendid descriptions in which the poets of all ages and every country have indulged with so much rapture and delight—I mean “the glories of the rising and the setting sun.” My merit, if merit I have any, consisted simply in this:—in the first place, it pleased Providence to give me an insatiable desire for knowledge; secondly, kind friends were willing to encourage that desire, by reading to me; thirdly, I was gifted with a powerful memory, that retained every thing that was presented to it. I, being poor, and having no books of my own, I was obliged to make my memory my library: and she was ever faithful to the trust committed to her keeping. There is a paper in the *Adventurer*, which was written about the time I was born, and which I think will describe my literary pretensions much better than anything which I can say of myself. It is as follows:—

“To read the works of celebrated writers, to comprehend their systems, and retain their reasonings, is a task by no means equal to common capacities ; nor is he to be counted either idle or useless, who has stored his mind with these treasures, and can retail them out to others, who have less time and less inclination for such studies.”

But to resume : I continued, occasionally, to compose some pieces of poetry, consisting, principally, of songs, written on the wit and good humour that prevailed in the club of which I was a member, with a few prologues to plays that were performed by the young men in the neighbourhood, for charitable purposes. These I collected together to prepare them for the press, but on examination, I found they had many faults, which had at first escaped my notice ; and though warmly urged by my friends to give them to the public, yet I was so well convinced they were destitute of merit, that I committed them to the flames, with the first two acts of a play, called “The Irish Exile’s Return.”

The person to whom I had entrusted the

management of my little domestic concerns, did not hesitate to take advantage of my ignorance of such affairs, as well as my situation. Many of my friends felt for me, and strongly advised me to marry, as I should be more comfortable, and be out of the power of such unprincipled people. They said, that could I meet with a sober steady woman, who would be likely to make a good wife, the change would be advantageous to me in more respects than one. I objected to this proposal, on the ground of my inability to provide for a family; the precarious manner of earning my subsistence put such a change beyond my expectation—it was enough for me to suffer alone—I could not think of entailing misery upon others. This they could not deny; but they then reasoned in this way; no one required the kind assistance of an affectionate wife more than a blind man; that I had not one friend, one relative to look after me. What then would become of me in my old age? I should be helpless in the extreme. These, and many other arguments, were used, to induce me to assent to a measure which they thought would finally conduce to my happiness. Their anticipations have since been fully realized—I am happy. I had the

pleasure of being known, for some time, to a young woman who lived in the neighbourhood ; having met her occasionally at the house of a friend, whom I used to visit. Her plain sense and unassuming manners, recommended her to my notice ; but what most endeared her to me was her filial piety. Her aged mother and she lived together, loved and respected by all who knew them ; and without any other dependence than the work of her own hands, she supported herself and parent. I thought that she, who was such an attentive and feeling daughter, must necessarily make an affectionate wife—and in this opinion I was not disappointed. Filial affection is so endearing a virtue, that, whenever we meet with an instance of it, whether in an exalted or an humble station, the exhibition of it must be, to the benevolent mind, a source of the highest gratification. It is a duty which our gracious and kind Creator has enjoined us to fulfil, commanding us in his holy word “to honour our father and mother,” as an inducement or motive to the performance of which, he has promised that our “days shall be long in the land ;” and he who has promised this, is able and willing to perform it.

I addressed a copy of verses to her, who had now become the object of my affection, which were printed in the first collection of my Poems. They had the desired effect—they produced an impression, which never has been, and I may venture to say, never will be effaced. After the expiration of two years, our correspondence happily terminated, and we were married on the 27th of November, 1802. Though she could boast of no high descent, no shewy accomplishments, nor of having brought me a fortune, yet she was possessed of such qualities as every virtuous mind will admire:—she was sober, modest, and unassuming; and though her education was not according to the rules laid down by Mrs. Hamilton, yet she understood, in her own way, the principles of domestic economy, prudence and frugality. Well has the wise man described a virtuous woman, when he says—“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.”

We have now lived forty years together, happy in each other's society; and though we have had many trials in the course of that time, such as the loss of children, bad health, and distressed circumstances, a murmur has never

escaped her lips. In our pilgrimage here below, these little crosses are necessary—they teach us to know ourselves. Were we to pass the little time, which is allotted to us in this world, without trials and afflictions, we should soon forget that we are dependent creatures; but a merciful Providence has wisely guarded us against this danger, by letting us feel our infirmities, and how little we can do for ourselves. We are assured in the word of God, that he never afflicts his creatures but for their good, and when these visitations are sanctified by his Holy Spirit, they then become profitable to us,—they wean us from the world, and we become tired of its flimsy joys, and imaginary pleasures; we learn from them—“that here we have no abiding city—but we seek one to come.”

We have had eleven children, of whom four only are now alive; and, with the exception of the diseases common to children, those living are all healthy and stout. It is certainly one of the greatest blessings which parents can enjoy, to see a vigorous offspring rise around them, and to listen to their innocent prattle. How often have I been struck with the force

and beauty of that passage in holy writ, where Jesus, in order to teach humility to his disciples, “called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them.” To descend from the Divine Author of our religion to creatures like ourselves, we read in Cox’s life of that pious reformer, Melancthon, that he was particularly fond of his children; and, notwithstanding the multiplicity of his engagements, the discharge of which, in those perilous times, was attended with difficulties and danger, he would often descend from that lofty station, where genius and public opinion had enthroned him, to the more endearing scenes of domestic retirement. A Frenchman one day found him holding a book in one hand, and with the other rocking his child’s cradle. Upon his manifesting considerable surprise, Melancthon took occasion from this incident, to converse with his visitor on the duties of parents, and on the regard of Heaven for little children, in such a pious and affectionate manner, that his astonishment was quickly transformed into admiration. Sully tells us, that Henry IV. used to steal from the pomp and pageantry of a Court, to amuse himself with his children. On one occasion, a gentleman, who waited upon his

Majesty, was told that he was in the Great Gallery—the Courtier found his way to the apartment, and on his entrance, how was he surprised, when he found this great man playing with his children, having one of them on his back, and chasing two others along the Gallery. The Monarch asked the Courtier if he was a father; being answered in the negative, “Well,” said Henry, “this is a pleasure which none but a father can feel.”

“There is in childhood a holy ignorance—a
“beautiful credulity—a sort of sanctity that we
“cannot contemplate without something of the
“reverential feeling, with which one should ap-
“proach beings of a celestial nature. The em-
“press of divine nature is, as it were, fresh on
“infant spirit—fresh and unsullied by contact
“with this withering world, one trembles lest an
“impure breath should dim the clearness of
“its bright mirror; and how perpetually must
“those—who are in the habit of contemplating
“childhood, of studying the characters of little
“children—feel and repeat to their own hearts,
“‘of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.’ Aye,
“which of us, of the wisest amongst us, may
“not stoop to receive instruction and rebuke

“from the character of a little child?—Which
 “of us, by comparison with its sublime simpli-
 “city, has not reason to blush for the littleness,
 “the insincerity, the worldliness, the degene-
 “racy of his own? How often has the inno-
 “cent remark, the artless question, the natural
 “acuteness of a child, called up into older
 “cheeks, a blush of accusing consciousness?
 “How often might the prompt, candid, honor-
 “able decision of an infant, in some question
 “of right and wrong, shame the hesitating, cal-
 “culating evasiveness of mature reason.”

“So that the philosophical beholder

“Sigh’d for their sakes—that they should e’er grow older.

The first of my literary acquaintances of any
 respectability, was John Lushington Reilly,
 Esquire, of Scarvagh, to whose family I was
 warmly recommended, by a lady who intro-
 duced me as a lover and composer of poetry.
 In this gentleman’s house I was employed for
 some time, and during my residence there, I was
 not treated as a common workman, but was
 highly entertained by Mr. and Mrs. Reilly,
 who had the goodness to read to me by turns,
 whilst I was at work; and in their absence, a

person was appointed to supply their place. Here there was a fine library, where I first met with Spencer's Fairy Queen. When I left home, I did not expect to remain at Scarvagh longer than three or four weeks at farthest, but such was the partiality of that worthy family for me, that I was detained there for nearly three months. On taking leave of my benefactors, Mr. Reilly observed, that I ought not to be tired of them, as they were not tired of me. To Mr. Reilly I addressed a few verses on his return from the army, which appeared in the second edition of my Poems. I had listened with much pleasure to the Treatise on Solitude, by that inimitable philosopher, Zimmerman ; but, although I had learned from books to imagine the pleasures of solitude, yet I never had an opportunity of experiencing its enjoyments, until my residence, at that time in the country. Some of our busy town's-people shudder at the idea of a country life, and conclude that the want of variety would render them miserable in retirement ; but the happiness of such is derived from bustle and confusion—from sources unstable as the wind, and nature is to them destitute of charms. It was not so with me ; the murmuring of the streams, the rustling of

the leaves, the singing of the birds, the lowing of the cattle, and bleating of the lambs, each had for me its charms, and excited in my mind the most pleasing sensations. As nature is superior to art in all her operations, so are the pleasures derived from the one far superior to the pleasures derived from the other, and every man of experience will acknowledge, that independently of religion, there is not any thing which affords such delight to the contemplative mind, as the works of creation.

“ By boundless love, and perfect wisdom formed,
“ And ever rising with the rising mind.”

From Scarvagh, I went to Drumbanagher, the seat of John Moore, Esq. where I was employed for some time. Mr. and Mrs. Moore were particularly attentive to me, and shewed me much kindness; and after spending some time in a few other gentlemen's houses, I returned home.

In 1812 I became acquainted with the late ingenious Miss Balfour. This lady was the author of several interesting works, in both prose and verse. I was introduced to her by John

Templeton, Esq. of Malone, a gentleman whose literary and scientific acquirements are too well known to require any eulogium from such an humble individual as I am. Miss Balfour felt much for my situation, and endeavoured, by every means in her power, to promote my interest. She offered to teach me grammar—and in order to encourage me, she said it would only require three weeks or a month at most; and as soon as I had attained a knowledge of the English language, she proposed to teach me French; but owing to the narrowness of my circumstances, I could not afford to devote to those studies the time which they would have required. I had a large family depending on me for support, for which I had no means of procuring bread, but by my own industry; and my poor wife having been long afflicted with bad health, was unable to render me any assistance: and to add to this, was often employed in the country. Had I then turned my attention to these studies, my children might have starved; and I was, therefore, obliged to decline this friendly offer, of which I was desirous to avail myself, as it might have been of much future advantage to me. This was one of the greatest sacrifices I ever made. It is true I

had a few friends who, had they been acquainted with these circumstances, would have been sorry to let me lose such an opportunity—but I was too sensible of their kindness—and was therefore unwilling to make any further claims upon their bounty.

“ From what blest spring did he derive his art—
“ To soothe our cares, and thus command the heart ?
“ How did the seeds lie quickening in his brain ?
“ How were they born without a parent’s pain ?
“ He did but think—and music did arise,
“ Dilating joy, as light o’erspread the skies ;
“ From an immortal source, like that it came ;
“ But light we know—this wonder wants a name !
“ What art thou ?—from what cause dost thou spring,
“ O music ! thou divine, mysterious thing ! ”

While I was travelling in the county Westmeath, I stopped for some time at the house of a friend, in the neighbourhood of Nobber. I went to visit the spot rendered famous by being the birth-place of Carolan, one of the most extraordinary geniuses that any age or country has yet produced. He was one of the last and most celebrated of the Irish Bards, whose compositions have been as much admired for their

extraordinary variety, as for their exquisite melody—he is said to have composed upwards of four hundred pieces. This account, however, is perhaps exaggerated ; but be this as it may, our national music has been greatly enriched by his productions. But it was not only in the composition of music that he distinguished himself—his poetry is also fine, for he wrote according to nature. Speaking of his loss of sight, he says—

“ Even he, whose hapless eyes no ray
“ Admit from beauty’s cheering day ;
“ Yet, though he cannot see the light,
“ He feels it warm, and knows its bright.”

And, to use the language of the poet, “ his compositions are like dreams of joy, that are past, pleasant, and mournful to the soul.” I am sorry to say, that we know but little of the history of this extraordinary genius. It appears that he spent his life as an itinerant musician, and was made welcome at the houses of the great ; and there, with the tales of other days, enlivened the convivial hours. It reflects no great credit on the times in which Carolan lived, that he was suffered to live in poverty, and die in obscurity ; but it has been too fre-

quently the lot of great geniuses to meet with neglect while living, and when dead to be lamented, and admired, as if mankind knew not their value until they were gone, and posterity were willing to compensate for the injuries they had experienced through life, by erecting to their memories splendid monuments. A trifle bestowed on them, while living and starving in an empty garret, would have rendered them more essential service, than all the sums lavished on the decorations of Westminster Abbey, to which they are insensible.

“ One night I dream’d I lay most eas y,
“ Down by a murmuring river side—
“ The lovely banks were spread with daisies,
“ And the streams did gently glide.”

OLD BALLAD.

I remember once conversing with a friend, on the nature of dreams. He asked me, if the blind ever did dream. I answered, “that the blind was as susceptible of dreams as those who were blessed with sight.” “But,” said he, “we dream of objects familiar to the vision; and, as the blind are strangers to those objects, I was at a loss to know of what their dreams consisted.” I told him, I would endeavour to

explain:—The blind may be divided into two classes. The first are those who never remember to have seen the light. When *they* sleep, they never dream of visible objects. Their dreams are always made up of conversations, or feeling the objects about them, or groping their way to some particular place. The second class are those who remember to have seen the light. *They* frequently dream of scenes once familiar to them; and in their sleeping hours, their imagination returns to those beloved objects with unmixed pleasure and delight. I, myself, often dream of that happy period, when I enjoyed the blessing of sight; and though the season was of short duration, yet, what I then saw of the beauties of nature, has been engraven on my memory in lasting characters. In sleep I frequently return to the scenes of my childhood. Then is presented to my imagination all those rural objects in their pristine freshness and beauty; the daisy-enameled field, the primrose banks, and the hawthorn in full blossom; and that sweet little stream, in whose limpid waters I have so often paddled, with the companions of my infant days. A few weeks ago, I had a dream: when I thought I was in the neighbourhood where I was brought up.

The sun beamed forth in unclouded splendour. Methought I saw the wind gently shake the trees, and turn up the white side of the leaf, on the road before me. I fancied that I saw people abroad, taking the air, and their clothes fluttering in the breeze. On the opposite side of the river, was a beautiful range of green sloping hills, variegated with corn-fields, groves and white-washed houses. I forgot in my sleep that I was old and blind. I ran, leaped, and shouted with joy; when, to my great disappointment, I awoke, and all this fair scene was lost, and in the words of the poet, "Left the world to darkness and to me."

"Now free from care, and tumult's torturing din,
"Young fancy led me from my humble cot;
"And far through space, where suns unnumbered burn,
"I with her took a grand excursive flight,
"Then back again to Erin's hills of green,
"I with her wandered; nor did night, nor gloom,
"One step intrude to shade the prospects round.
"I saw sweet Scarvagh, in her loveliest garb,
"And all her trees in summer's dress were clad;
"Her honour'd mansion, seat of peace and love,
"Gave rapture to my breast, for there I've found
"True hospitality, which once did grace
"The halls of Erin's chiefs of old;—
"But soon, alas! the hum of nightly bands,
"And vagrants, strolling on in quest of sin,
"Bore fancy from me with her golden train,
"And once more left me in the folds of night:"

The sense of sight is not the only one of which I am deprived, for I never remember to have enjoyed that of smell. In my opinion, this sense can be more easily dispensed with, than any of the other four. I remember a lady of my acquaintance, who possessed this sense so exquisitely, that the least disagreeable odour was so offensive, as to produce a severe headache ; when she understood that I was destitute of what she possessed in so extraordinary a degree, she observed, very justly, “it is well for you ; for if you have no pleasure from that source, you have no pain.” When spring unfolds itself in all its genial influences, it is, no doubt, pleasant to range through the country, and inhale the fragrance arising from the shrubs and flowers ; but on coming into a large town or populous city, the circumstances are entirely changed, and the effluvia arising from the narrow lanes and alleys become exceedingly disagreeable.

The improvement of my mind, by the acquisition of useful and substantial knowledge, now engrossed my attention. To attain this, I knew that books and conversation were the only means, and, therefore, I carefully cultivated the

friendship of such persons as were distinguished by their taste and intelligence. I was very fortunate in getting acquainted with a number of individuals, whose literary acquirements and love of virtue, reflected honour on their names. In the society of such persons, I could not fail in acquiring much mental improvement, and their conversation, remarks, and advice were of great use to me.

It has been remarked by an elegant writer, that geography is the eye of history—the latter recording the time, and the former the place, in which any remarkable event has happened. To be acquainted with the names, situations, and boundries of places, together with the tranactions of other years, forms now an essential part of a good education. To the blind, in this respect, a large field is laid open, and if a good memory accompanies conversation, and to hearing history and geography read, they may lay up a store that will not fail, as a source of amusement, both to themselves and others. In these two branches of knowledge I was very assiduous, and find, that to the present day, my memory is exceedingly tenacious of what I then learned. In relation to geography, I became

acquainted with every place of note in the habitable globe, so that, on being examined by some who were either curious, or doubtful of my knowledge, my descriptions have been found to coincide with the best constructed maps.

Wisdom is the great end of history: it is designed to supply the want of experience; though it enforce not its instruction with the same authority, yet it furnishes us with a greater variety of information than it is possible for experience to afford, in the course of the longest life. Its object is to enlarge our views of the human character, and to give full exercise to our judgment on the affairs of men.

Let us hear what PLUTARCH says upon the subject:—"I live," says he, "entirely upon history; and while I contemplate the picture that it presents to my view, my mind enjoys a rich repast from the representation of great and virtuous characters. If the actions of men produce some instances of vice, corruption, and dishonesty, I endeavour, nevertheless, to remove the impression, or defeat its effect. My mind withdraws itself from the scene, and free

from every ignoble passion, I attach myself to these high examples of virtue, which are so agreeable and satisfactory, and which accord so completely with the genuine feelings of our nature."

CICERO has also justly observed, that history is the light of ages, the depository of events, the faithful evidence of truth, the source of prudence and good counsels, and the rule of conduct and manners.

Respecting history, the reader will best judge of the power of my memory by the following relation.—To a few select friends who wished to prove my knowledge of English history, I repeated, to their entire satisfaction, an epitome of the history of England, from the Norman conquest till the peace in 1783, including invasions, conspiracies, insurrections, and revolutions; the names of all the Kings and Queens, the year of their accession, the length of their reigns, and the affinity each had to his predecessor, together with the names and characters of all the great statesmen, heroes, philosophers, and poets, who flourished in the different reigns. In consequence of this, and

different rehearsals, I was termed, "The Living Book," and "A Walking Encyclopædia;" to others, my knowledge, in such circumstances, appeared as a prodigy, but to myself it proved a source of consolation, and beguiled many a tedious hour.

"Tho' darkness still attends me,
It aids internal sight;
And from such scenes defends me,
As blush to see the light.

"No weeping objects grieve me;
No glitt'ring fop offends;
No fawning smiles deceive me;
Kind darkness me befriends.

"Then cease your useless wailings,
I know no reason why
Mankind, to their own failings,
Are all as blind as I."

The circle of my acquaintance was at this time greatly enlarged, and I had the honour of ranking among my friends some of the most distinguished characters of this country. Among these was Dr. Percy, Bishop of Dromore. This great man was the last of that illustrious school of which Johnson, Goldsmith, and Burke, were members. His fine taste and literary talents

were accompanied by sweetness of temper and a benevolent disposition. From the Rev. H. Boyd, (a gentleman well known in the literary world as the translator of the Italian Poet, Dante, and author of some other original works of great merit) I received the most marked attention. His kindness, and that of his family, indeed, I cannot easily forget; on several occasions he has rendered me very essential services, and it yields me no small degree of pleasure to reflect, that I still enjoy the friendship of a man as eminently distinguished for his virtues as for his talents.

There are few blind persons who are not blessed with strongly retentive memories, and added to this, their ear is open to all the variety of sweet sounds; but the sense of sight gives to the mind a more ample range, lays open the book of universal knowledge, which, to the blind, is covered over with an impenetrable veil. The art of printing, which has diffused knowledge to an extent unknown even to the brightest ages of antiquity, sheds not its enlivening rays for their instruction and amusement. Ever dependent on the generosity of others, the streams of knowledge flow to

them through narrow and irregular channels ; but Providence, in all things just, deprived them of one perceptive power, seems to have bestowed an additional vigour on those which remain. I have often experienced much difficulty in procuring readers, for it would have been unreasonable to expect persons to forego their pleasures, or quit their business, in order to gratify me ; yet some have done both, for my amusement. Men, however, vary in their tastes with respect to books, as they do with regard to food ; some readers can find no charms in poetry, others can find no interest in biography, and some have a particular aversion to books of a philosophical nature—and I was, therefore, necessitated to adopt the subject which best agreed with the taste of my readers. From these circumstances, I was generally obliged to listen to two or three different kinds of books in a day :—for instance, history before breakfast ; natural philosophy during the day ; poetry in the evening ; and, by way of dessert, a few passages from some of our sentimental writers.

THE DEAF AND DUMB.

Dr. Gilly, in his Essay, entitled a "Parallel on the Blind and Dumb," speaking of these unhappy mutes, he says—

"People are constantly asking us, which are the most unhappy—the Deaf and Dumb, or the Blind? To what is the gaiety of the one, and the profound melancholy of the other, owing? we shall resolve this question to the advantage of the blind: because we really think them less unhappy—strangers to all that passes around them. The deaf and dumb, who see everything, enjoy nothing; like Tantalus, whom fiction represents as devoured by an inextinguishable thirst, in the midst of water—they are continually subjected to cruel privations; an insurmountable barrier separates them from the rest of mankind. They are solitary in the midst of us, unless we borrow that artificial language which the talent and charity of their ingenious teacher has created for them; and the habit which they have of reading the countenances, is even very often a subject of anxiety to them—they do not always guess right; doubt

and uncertainty increase their impatient suspicions; a serious cast, like melancholy, then invades their countenance, and proves that with us they are in a real state of privation, obliged to concentrate their thoughts in themselves;—the activity of their imagination is thus greatly increased, and as attention and judgment necessarily follow the preception of ideas, they fatigue themselves prodigiously. Few deaf and dumb persons, therefore, are to be found in the list of longevity, because the frictions are too lively, and to use a common but exact expression, “the sword wears the scabbard.”

It appears that, as the attention of the blind is not diverted by objects presented to the sight, they are peculiarly fitted to attain perfection in whatever is conveyed to the mind by oral instruction. Some of the best poets and musicians that have ever appeared in the world, were men from whom the fair face of nature was shut out, who never saw the refulgent sun dart his rays through the opening clouds, tinging with rosy light the hills and plains, and gladdening all animated nature. How many thousand objects which give pleasure to the beholder present themselves on every side, but

the rich variety of colours which decorates the ample field of nature, is displayed in vain before the blind, and to them this fair scene is shrouded in universal night.

Never had the blind so powerful an apologist, so eloquent an eulogist, as in that prime ornament of their afflicted family, MILTON; who, in that noble descant on his loss of sight, which occurs in his “Second Defence of the People of England,” speaks to this effect, in words of the purest and strongest Latin:—

“And surely we blind are not the last care
“of God. Woe, woe, to him who mocks—to
“him who harms us! *Us*, whom the Divine
“law, the Divine power, has not only shielded
“from injury, but has rendered almost sacred!
“He seems, indeed, to have brought this dark-
“ness upon us, not so much by the bedimming
“of our eyes, as by the overshadowing of His
“heavenly wings; a darkness which He not
“seldom illumines with interior and far more
“gracious light. So may I be consummated
“by this infirmity! So may I be thus irradi-
“ated by obscurity.”

The state of my affairs at this time wore rather an unfavourable appearance. The profits arising from my publications were very small; they did little more than satisfy the demands of the printer and paper manufacturer. I wished, above all things, to select a subject on which I could employ my mind more extensively than it had hitherto been engaged, and having devoted much of my time to the study of biography, I found, on acquaintance with this useful branch of history, that there were many in all ages, and in every country, who had laboured under the same calamity with myself, and who had eminently distinguished themselves by their attainments in literature and science. I thought, if these were collected together, and moulded into a new form, it might not only become an amusing, but, a useful work, so far as it would show what perseverance and industry could do, in enabling us to overcome difficulties apparently insurmountable. It concerned not me at what time of life, or by what cause they lost their sight, provided that they distinguished themselves after they became blind. My chief object was to prove the energy of the human mind, under one of the greatest privations to which we are liable in this life. In contem-

plating the lives and characters of these illustrious individuals, who had devoted their time and applied their talents to promote the happiness of their fellow-creatures, we shall find, that they have been, considering their number, as usefully employed as any class of men, with whose works we are acquainted. Poets, the foremost in renown, have been incapable of the perception of external objects. The two finest poems in the world, the “*Iliad*” and “*Paradise Lost*,” are the immortal productions of the blind. The eyes of Homer and Milton rolled in vain, and found no dawn; yet in the forcible expression of the latter, were their minds “inly irradiated,” and they have sung of things invisible to mortal sight.

These two great epic poets, like Saturn and Jupiter, in the planetary system, shine bright stars of excellence, round which, inferior orbs for ever move in dull succession. Homer and Milton have long held the first rank among poets. The vigour of their minds; the brilliancy of their imaginations; the flights of their genius, like those of inspiration, extended to the very boundaries of time and space.

“Is not each great, each amiable muse,
“Of classic ages in thy Milton met?
“A genius, universal as his theme;
“Astonishing as chaos, as the bloom
“Of blowing Eden fair, as Heaven sublime.”—

THOMPSON.

It has not been only in the different departments of literature that they have distinguished themselves, but also in the more extensive fields of science and of the arts, they have reaped honours which will transmit their names to the remotest posterity.

It was partly with a view of rescuing my fellow-sufferers from the neglect and obscurity in which many of them were enveloped, that I undertook the present work—an undertaking attended with immense labour and much research, to one like me, which will readily be allowed, when it is considered I had often to depend on the good nature of strangers for such books as were necessary for my purpose, and even for readers and amanuenses. However, after wading through innumerable difficulties, which nature and fortune threw in my way, the work made its appearance in 1820, in one volume, 12mo., containing nearly 400 pages, closely

printed. The reception it met with from the public was gratifying to my feelings, and far surpassed anything I could have expected.

A history of the blind, by a blind man, excited a good deal of curiosity among the reading portion of the public, and called forth the sympathy of several benevolent individuals in favour of its afflicted author.

When I was in Edinburgh, Mr. C., the celebrated phrenologist, asked me for a cast of my head, to which I consented; but, at the same time, I told him I did not pretend to know anything of the science. The following remarks on this subject appeared in the *Phrenological Journal* :—

“His temperament is bilious-nervous; his head is large; and the organs of individuality, size, weight, and locality, are very much developed. The constant and very vivid exercise of these organs seems to have caused them to attain a larger size than probably they would otherwise have reached; while the organs of colouring are very obviously stunted in their

dimensions, from want of exercise. His eyes have suffered so much from disease, that it is difficult to judge accurately by their appearance of the size of the organ of language: but it appears to us to have been well developed. The extraordinary cultivation of it, joined to his favourable temperament, which gives at once strength and sensibility, and the aid afforded by his large individuality, account for his extraordinary powers of memory. He is modest and intelligent in conversation, and altogether is a very interesting person."

Phrenological Journal, June, 1836.

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Mr. B., a gentleman in Gloucestershire, who has devoted much of his time to the study of phrenology, also took a cast from my head. In a letter to a friend, he says:—

"Prestbury, November 22, 1841.

"Dear Sir,

"I take leave to introduce to your
"notice, a case of considerable interest in the
"person of Mr. Wilson, the blind traveller."

“He is one of those examples of the power
“of organization to overcome the immense dif-
“ficulties presented by his privation. The effect
“of exercise, and the want of it, are finely illus-
“trated. All the perceptions (save only colour)
“being in a high state of activity in his brain.”

“Mr. Wilson will be found a highly intelli-
“gent, yet a perfectly unassuming person. A
“little work which he has written, and from the
“sale of which he principally derives support,
“will be found replete with interesting matter,
“and to be highly creditable to his moral, as well
“as to his intellectual character.”

“Trusting that I have not presumed too far
“on your kindness,”

“Remain, yours, very faithfully,

“R. B.”

The following rhyming letter was written by one of the Society of Friends, in favour of James Wilson, the author of the History of the Blind:—

Pray read this, and look,
For the bearer will brook
To be gaz'd on, because he can't see :
He's blind of both eyes,
Yet, what may surprise,
Much further than many can see.

And now he is bound,
On a very long round,
To get names, written down upon paper,
And a book he will print,
With biography in't—
Not of Grafton, or Junius, or Draper ;

But of men who were wise,
Like himself, without eyes ;
Yet could many things do without sight,
Quite as well as the few
Who of eyes have full two,
Yet need a wax candle at night.

Then help him, I pray :
And by night and by day
He'll be sure to consider thy kindness,
And grateful he'll be—
Or, if not, tell it me,
And I'll wish him made well of his blindness.

He's a good honest man—
And, whenever he can,
He loves to hear reading from books ;
And though he can't see,
Yet I truly tell thee,
That intelligence beams in his looks.

Old Johnson he knows,
 And the ten gouty toes
 Of the tosser of pots, Sheridan ;
 He of Shakspeare can tell,
 And knows Milton as well
 As he does every other great man.

Sir Walter the Scott,
 It is James Wilson's lot
 To know just as well as another ;
 And the long William Pitt,
 Who in Commons did sit,
 He loved just as well as his brother.

If more thou would'st know,
 Then ask him to go
 And stay for some evening to talk ;
 But let not thy wine,
 Though excellently fine,
 Make his legs quite too blind for a walk.

Two more, and I've done—
 For the thread I have spun,
 Of my rhyming, this whimsical night ;
 Give him help on his way,
 And be glad of the day
 He presented himself to thy sight.

And remember, 'twas I
 (My name by and by)
 Who sent this good man for a squeeze
 Of thy *true English hand* ;
 So no more—but command
 Thy olden friend, *Joseph Humphreys*.

Claremont, 20.—3rd Month, 1824.

Verses in imitation of "John Anderson, my Joe," addressed to James Wilson, by one of the Society of Friends:—

Jamie Wilson ! Jamie Wilson, when first I saw thine eyes,
I deem'd not thou could'st write a book,
I knew not thou wert wise ;
But soon I found that thou could'st ken
More than a many see,
For who could write about the blind,
James Wilson, well as thee.

Thou see'st the rain-bow in the sky,
The rain-bow of thy mind,
Thou see'st the sun at noon-day bright,
Altho' thou art so blind ;
Thou see'st the lark ascend the sky,
As well as hears his strain,
James Wilson will I deem, thy blindness gives no pain.

Jamie Wilson ! Jamie Wilson, there was a time when thou
Knew not what care nor trouble is,
When sun-shine lit thy brow ;
But thy hair is frosted over,
And brooding care has made
The sun-shine of thy early days,
A dim and misty shade.

Jamie Wilson ! Jamie Wilson, I bid thee farewell now,
May smoother paths lie in thy way,
May peace sit on thy brow ;
But may'st thou in thy wanderings,
Nay, wheresoe'er thou roam,
Remember that thou hast a friend—
A friend in many a home.

The following Testimonial is from a medical gentleman of high standing:—

“I beg most respectfully to state that I have known the highly-gifted James Wilson, for some time, and that every statement in his life, from all my enquiries, is completely borne out, and not over-drawn; and when I consider that he has been blind from three years of age, I am much astonished at his powers as an Historian, Geographer, and a Poet; but, what is of far more importance, his unaffected piety, reverential love and attachment to our pure, Apostolic, Anglican Church; and it is with much confidence I make this statement, and that I have seen a letter to him from our highly-gifted Poet, Southey, doing much honour to his heart and feelings.

“ROBERT BRIEN,

“Surgeon, R.N. & M.R.C.S.”

“London,

“June 14th, 1841.”

It is pleasing, to a pious mind, to contemplate the footsteps of an all-directing Providence, to trace the progress of the human mind in various relations, and become acquainted with the actions of individuals, who have laboured under great difficulties.

The present Memoir is offered to the reader as a simple, unvarnished tale, and is calculated to awaken those sentiments of sympathy, which are common both to the peasant and philosopher.

To have reflected on the goodness of Divine Providence, from the first hour of my existence, through a period of nearly seventy years; on the numberless preservations from danger, which, through that course of time, had threatened my life or my happiness; and on the many positive blessings with which I had so long been favoured; could not, I believe, have failed to excite a lively and extraordinary sense of the unmerited goodness of God to me, and would probably have proved a peculiarly animating source of humble and grateful recollection.

“ My God, my Father, while I stray

“ Far from my home, on life’s rough way,

“ O teach me from my heart to say,

“ Thy will be done.

“ Though dark my way, and sad my lot,

“ Let me be still, and murmur not,

“ And breathe that prayer divinely taught—

“ Thy will be done.”

Persuaded, from the kind encouragement I have experienced, that this narrative will fall into the hands of many of my distinguished and disinterested friends, I should consider myself ungrateful, were I not to declare, that no length of time, no change of circumstances, will ever be able to efface from my memory, the pleasing recollections of unmerited kindness so long experienced ; recollections which are stamped in indelible characters upon my heart.

JAMES WILSON.



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